On the Pitfalls of Total Quality Management: A literature Evaluation from the Managerial Perspective

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Abstract

As a management philosophy and a set of guiding principles Total Quality Management (TQM) aims an effective use of whole resources of an organization and contributes an organization to achieve its objectives. Since the philosophy of TQM was developed, TQM has been attracting the attention of academics and managers. Though there is a large number of literatures about success stories and benefits TQM, many TQM implementation programs fail because of various reasons. Because implementation of TQM is not without difficulties and there is no easy way to be successful.

The main objective of the article is to present pitfalls of implementation of TQM based on reviewing the literature. It is asserted that obstacles to a successful implementation of TQM are managerial, not individual. The article may be useful for managers and practitioners to avoid pitfalls of implementing TQM.

Keywords: Total Quality Management, successful implementation, pitfalls, obstacles

1. Introduction

Total Quality Management (TQM) is a management strategy and a philosophy (Kavrakoglu, 1994: 125). The philosophy of TQM became a "top action item" and took a great interest in business and academic world over the years (Rao et al., 1999: 67; Jones, 1998: 410). TQM aims at "continuously improving the quality of all the organization's processes, products, and services" (Kotler, 2000: 56) by improving effectiveness, efficiency, cohesiveness, flexibility, and competitiveness (Tobin,1990: 10).

Although TQM philosophy takes great interest in busines, more than sixty percent of TQM implementations fails due to variety of reasons (Kumar & Sharma, 2015: 19; Hubiak & O'Donnell, 1996: 19). Recognizing the pitfalls that possibly impede effective TQM implementation can contribute managers and consultants to improve their strategies to get better outcomes.

Academic google database was searched. Keywords included TQM, problems, failure, barriers, obstacles, impediments and pitfalls. The selection was restricted between 1990 and 2021. More than 40 articles analysed to explain the obstacles to the successful implementation of TQM.

2. Why do TQM programs fail?

Just as someone buys the most advanced equipment and fails to get its benefits, many administrators hear or read about the TQM, but they do not understand philosophy and how that philosophy can be applied (Babbar, 1995: 35). A successful implementation of TQM is not "just a matter of advocating" it. The transformation involved by TQM needs additional action on internal and external fronts (Degeling & Carnegie, 1995)

Failure of TQM implementations depends on some basic factors, may not because of TQM philosophy or principles. Any implementation of TQM not involving every person in the firm including the customer and supplier, not satisfying customer requirements exactly and without fully committed senior executives will sooner or later face failure. Some more detailed reasons of failures are explained below. Some of these reasons may be more crucial than the others depending on sectors. Bu all reasons are more or less related each other.

2.1. Beginning without understanding

Lack of managers' understanding is one of the main obstacles to adopt TQM (Rawlani, 2020:55). First, top management must develop a complete and clear understanding of what TQM is. Top management must understand the nature, purpose and principles of TQM. Moreover, top management should understand necessity, usefulness and strategic importance and possibility of implementation of TQM in the organization. Without top management's understanding and justification, TQM program is likely vulnerable to fail (Taylor & Wright, 2003: 97, 100; Mosadeghrad, 2014: 165, 166). Because all steps and conditions of a successful TQM depends on top managers' complete and clear understanding of what TQM.

2.2. Lack of managerial competences

According to Deming (1986) most quality problems are derived from managers' fault or poor management style. Most pitfalls and roots of fear relate to absence of managerial competences. Therefore, managers must have enough competence, namely knowledge, skill and expertise (Ljungström & Klefsjö, 2002: 621; Dilawo & Salimi, 2019: 1151) in management functions, TQM and related fields such as empowerment, teams, communication, problem solving, decision making, process management and management information systems.

Managers must have an adequate competence to recognize existing mental models of quality and to change it (Hubiak and O'Donnell, 1996: 29). Managers should have enough competence to create a vision to inspire and lead employees toward quality improvement. Katz (1993: 24–28) argues that ignorance of the "basics of good management" results in direct failure with no exception.

Managerial competences may not guarantee the absence of fear, but they may reduce it (Bugdol, 2020: 2028-2033). One should know that a new role may need new competences. Requirement of new competencies for managers may be also a source of managerial resistance against changes.

2.3. Lack of management commitment and involvement

A strong commitment from top management is fundamental for a successful TQM implementation (Chiarini & Baccarani, 2016: 385-87). Because there is a close interrelationship between top managers' commitment and employee's commitment and TQM success (Soltani et al., 2005: 1009). Thus, absence of top management commitment is one the main pitfalls of a successful TQM implementation (Brown et al., 1994: 58; Huq, 2005,454; Talapatra, 2018: 1297; Dilawo & Salimi, 2019: 1147; García-Alcaraz et al.,2019: 1; Krajcsák, 2019: 402; Rawlani, 2020:55).

Manager may think that they do not have enough resources to invest TQM and they do not have time to dedicate to TQM (Al-Khalaf, 1997: 12). If employees do not see any commitment from above, they will be often unexcited or unmotivated and not take the initiative seriously (McManus, 1994: 8). Managers' attitudes towards quality have an extremely important influence on employees' quality acceptance and on an organizational culture which supports quality improvement. Managers should be a role models to employees to encourage them to pursue the quality path. All organizational levels managers should be open, supportive, informative, enthusiastic and trustworthy. Trust is important in the TQM concept. If a manager says one thing but does something else, an important credibility gab occur between the manager and employees. In this situation people do not feel encouraged toward quality (Babbar, 1995: 52; Taylor & Wright, 2003: 99; Dilawo & Salimi, 2019: 1148; Bugdol & Piotr, 2020: 732). Involvement for a successful TQM implementation is crucial at all managerial level from top to front line managers. Because middle level managers serve as change agent to convey values, principles, objectives and strategies into lower-level managers. It is not likely to be successful unless they do not get involved or resists.

2.4. Lack of appropriate leadership.

Supportive leadership as a component of supportive organizational environment is necessary to implement TQM successfully (Mosadeghrad, 2014: 163; Al Nahyan & All, 2017: 1).

Improper leadership styles in TQM may result in a type fear that causes low group cohesion, lack of coordination and communication, disobedience, poor results of quality, decline in preventive and corrective measures and various defensive attitudes (Bugdol, 2020: 2026).

Which type of leadership is the most appropriate for a successful implementation of TQM project is under question. Supportive, democratic, charismatic and participative leadership styles may allow employee involvement (Mosadeghrad, 2014: 164). But "transformational leadership" may be the most appropriate option for organizations applying TQM (Long et al., 2013: 1474). Because a transformational leader can energise staffs, encourage flow of information across functional areas and realize transformation of organisational cultures. An authoritarian leadership would be a disaster for TQM (Nwabueze 2011: 334, 335).

2.5. Lack of strategic management approach

Nature of TQM gives importance to strategic issues. From the strategic point of view, an organization must have a clear and shared vision, mission, goals, plans and strategies. TQM as a key strategy to develop quality and performance must be necessarily incorporated with organizational goals and strategies. So, TQM challenges must be clearly defined in the management functions (Akpoviroro, 2019: 309).

Planning is an important function of strategic management. For a successful TQM implementation, plans and programs should be carefully developed, be customized according to conditions of the firm such as maturity and readiness for change and conditions and type of industry (Dooley & Flor, 1998: 157-174).

In an organization there may be some conflicting objectives and interests among units or departments. Top management must conciliate these conflicting interest and objectives with the organizational goals. Moreover, they should prioritize them.

The Quality issue is totally a key strategic business rather than merely an operational issue. But some managers who do not understand nature of TQM and its strategic importance focus on dealing with daily operational problems, rather than focusing on creating new opportunities that add value to the customers (Taylor & Wright, 2003: 104, 105). Focusing on strategic issues do not necessarily neglect operational issues. Each issue should have its own priority. Moreover, objectives, strategies and operational issues must be coherent and consistent with each other.

2.6. Lack of customer focus

Customer focus is one of the of the success factor of TQM implementation (Samat, et al., 2006: 724; Amin et al., 2017: 1265). Therefore, especially in service sector ignoring customer focus is likely to result in failure in the competitive environment. An organization implementing TQM must understand its customer's needs and expectations and make or arrange its strategies, processes and procedures according to customer focus (Chiarini & Baccarani 2016: 380, 387; Talapatra, 2018: 1297).

2.7. Lack of training and education

TQM journey begins with a deep training at all levels. All staff needs training and education for the implementation process of TQM and about tools and components of TQM. Appropriate training is positively related to organizational performance, employee performance and motivation, and customer outcomes (Sadikoglu & Olcay, 2014: 13).

Continuous and widespread training/education is means of continuous improvement and required cultural changes. Continuous training/ education makes staff more enthusiastic toward quality improvement and develops awareness about TQM. Training/ education plays an important role in securing involvement and commitment for quality improvement (Mosadeghrad, 2014: 165, 169; Akpoviroro, 2019: 309). Furthermore, involvement of people also increases awareness of TQM (Chiarini & Baccarani, 2016: 386, 387).

New tasks should be assigned to people only after they are given adequate training, support and information (Bugdol, 2020: 2030). Therefore, top management should recognize training and education as essential for quality improvement (Snape et al., 1995: 44-49), not a source of cost. "One size fits all approach" should be avoided. The right amount of training and education for the right staff at the right time should be chosen and delivered (Brown, Hitchcock & Willard 1994: 59). Moreover, Training and workshops should be transformed well into working life. Otherwise, people rarely use the knowledge gained from the training programs and workshops (McManus, 1994: 8) and begin to think that these are good things but not suitable for us.

2.8. Lack of quality culture

Managers should take the organizational culture into consideration during the evaluation step of TQM (Hilman et al., 2019: 75; Colakoglu & Simsek, 2019: 1314). The organisational culture in accord with the values and principles of TQM facilitates managers' initiatives to achieve success. An effective TQM implementation needs a supportive quality culture that can adapt to changes and promote innovation. This culture concentrates on improvement, flexibility and external environment, related with development, innovation and adaptation (Colakoglu & Simsek, 2019: 1302, 1314). In this culture everyone accepts their personal responsibility to improve quality as a natural process of their own job (Chadwick, 1995: 43). In other word all staff in the organization have a common understanding of quality. But having a quality culture is not an easy task or a natural process. It needs real changes in mentalities, believes, attitudes and behaviours.

Snape et al. (1995: 45) emphasizes that a successful TQM implementation necessitates far-reaching changes, not only in HRM policies, but also in management style and work organization. For some organization resistance to change may be the most important problem (Rawlani, 2020:55) because of various reasons. Therefore, managers should address the issue of resistance to change and take necessary actions to make suitable organizational culture to foster TQM (Unal, 2001: 14). Leadership has a key role to create an organizational culture supporting continuous quality improvement, especially in some individualistic cultures. Teamwork, participation, communication and empowerment are some of the important components of the supportive quality culture.

2.9. Delegating quality responsibility to lover levels or consultants

Although delegation is a basic tenet of management, this should not be applied in TQM processes (Katz, 1993: 24-28). If top management allocates its responsibility for quality to lower-level managers, a specialised Quality Department or outsider, performance deteriorates. The seniority of the person responsible for leading TQM or seniority of management commitment is more likely to lead to success of TQM implementation (Taylor & Wright, 2003: 99, 106).

Activities such as team buildings and promoting team efforts are very important issues to improve quality. Heads of departments or managers must engage in such activities. These activities cannot be delegated to lover level staff or to consultants. This type of delegation undermines the TQM project and deteriorate the involvement of staff (Chiarini & Baccarani, 2016: 386)

2.10. Lack of enough resources

Lack of enough resource is one of the important difficulties organizations face in the implementation of TQM (Ljungström & Klefsjö, 2002: 621; Jaeger.& Adair, 2016: 333; Rawlani, 2020:55). TQM implementation programs necessitate enough financial, physical and human resource allocation. First, financial and physical resources necessary to train people about TQM philosophy and processes (Akpoviroro, 2019: 309). If an organization has significant financial problems, TQM may cause grater organizational problems. In this case implementation should be postponed (Mosadeghrad, 2014: 167). Second, implementation of TQM may need extra staff or may cause more workload on staff, otherwise employee shortage exists. Over workload or employee shortage may result in failure of TQM implementation. So, management should take the effect of over workload and employee shortage into consideration in TQM implementation.

2.11. Expecting immediate benefits in the sort-run

Adaptation and institutionalization of TQM is a continuous and comprehensive process, not a short run activity. A successful implementation of TQM needs an appropriate quality culture. Development of a supportive quality culture is a difficult-long process and takes many years (Snape et al., 1995: 69; Kumar & Sharma, 2015: 16). A successful implementation of TQM requires determination, persistence and patience (Aktan, 1999: 1-13). Some companies implement TQM with expectation of quick payback in the sort-run and stop supporting for TQM initiative (Hug, 2005: 465).

2.12. Unrealistic and ambiguous expectation

A successful TQM implementation may offer many potential advantages. Some of these advantages may be exaggerated by consultants [TQM marketers] who have weak technical foundations of practices (David & Strang, 2006). Therefore, some managers can develop unreasonable, unrealistic and ambiguous expectations at the very beginning. Moreover, these managers want to get all advantages together. When managers and employees do not get the expected outcomes from implementation, they may be disappointed and begin to develop some negative perceptions regarding TQM philosophy.

They need to know that success and failure are relative (Dooley & Flor, 1998: 157-174). Managers should be realistic about outcomes of TQM implementation and they should recognize that successful outcomes depend on a successful implementation in a quality supportive organizational environment.

2.13. Lack of employee involvement

TQM is not something that is only to do with the elite people (McManus, 1994: 9). Each employee should be aware of importance of overall quality management (Shammas-Toma, et al., 1998, 513) and activated in some way both individually and collectively. So that they can feel that they are part of the project or company. TQM provides every employee with an

opportunity to be part of a team. Employees who participate in the project are more positive, but those who do not have the chance of participation can show negativity. Successful implementation of TQM depends on all parts of the organization working together and educate and develop themselves in teams (Garbutt, 1996: 16-22; García-Alcaraz et al., 2019: 1; Jackson and Schuller, 2000: 138). Consequently lack of employee involvement is one of the most important obstacle (Jaeger.& Adair, 2016: 333; Krajcsák, 2019: 402) to successful implementation of TQM. Management should focus on eliminating this obstacle by motivating and encouraging employees to participate in quality circles, empowering employees and eliminating fears etc.

2.14. Imitating rather than benchmarking TQM model

An effective implementation of TQM needs a holistic, coherent and consistent approach. But there is not a standard approach or method for implementation (Mosadeghrad, 2011: 162-163). TQM application consists of many steps depending on the structure, culture, circumstances of the subject institution. Therefore, every institution should design and develop its own TQM approach or method according to its own values, principles, and circumstances. Imitating an TQM model or implementation from outside may not result in success.

2.15. Lack of coordination and communication among stakeholders

An institution must identify its stakeholders namely staff (internal customers), customers and suppliers. Each group of stakeholder has different priorities and necessitates different attempts to satisfy their different needs (Unal, 2001: 6). Managers should take the relative importance of each stakeholder into consideration and balance and reconcile these diverse groups interests (Hewitt & Clayton, 1999: 839).

Suppliers' partnership is also an important factor of a successful TQM because of their role in decreasing cost and securing input quality. Lack of involvement of key suppliers in quality improvement, lack of information sharing with suppliers, lack of jointly working with suppliers and customers and lack of trust among suppliers are some of the obstacles to the successful TQM implementation (Kaur, 2020: 379).

Communication channels should be open among all the stakeholders. They should be kept informed and coordinated to be involved in entire process of TQM. Without effective communication and inspiration through the company, TQM initiative will fail (McManus, 1994: 9; Dooley & Flor, 1998: 157-174; Shammas-Toma, et al., 1998, 513). Strategies, objectives and the deployment path of TQM implementation have to be communicated to all the staff and departments in the organization (Chiarini & Baccarani, 2016: 387). Accordingly, to overcome the fear of changes, employees should be informed about the objectives of changes, about the implementation, about the achievements and moreover be involved in the processes (Bugdol, 2020: 1229).

2.16. Lack of continuous learning

TQM is not one step action. It follows plan-do-check-do cycle. After evaluating how the program works, corrective actions must be taken to narrow the gap between the current situation and the proposed goals. And this is an unending process to get better results.

Continuous improvement should be an integral part of the whole system and its processes. Effective use of all resources and increasing productivity, reducing errors and cost without decreasing customers' satisfaction must be the main target of whole system. If the team or company can adapt to change and make some improvements via feedback, that means continuous learning takes place (Evans & Lindsay, 1999: 122). Without continuous learning an institution falls behind its competitors. It is management responsibility to make the institution a learning organization.

2.17. Understanding TQM as filling some documents and meetings

There are two aspects of TQM documentation. First, some implementers or consulting agencies indice TQM into just red type. That is, just filling forms, organizing periodical meetings, and having ISO documents on the wall etc. Second, employees and managers can be upset by frequent meetings and large amount of documentation required by TQM. Therefore, they might think that TQM is too complex, boring and time consuming (Dooley & Flor, 1998: 157-174; Taylor & Wright, 2003: 101, 103). Management should revise all process as well documentation processes. Unnecessary documentation processes should be eliminated. Effective using of management information system can eliminate some unnecessary documentation and save time.

2.18. Lack of measurement of key parameters

TQM necessitates to measure customer satisfaction, employee satisfaction, process improvement, sales and financial performance. Therefore, management needs timely, relevant and correct data and information to manage effectively and monitor TQM process. Poor data measurement (Al-Khalaf, 1997: 12; Dilawo & Salimi, 2019: 1151;); absence or difficulties in gathering data and information to measure some of these key parameters results in errors in decision making or misevaluation of TQM. Decision making without timely, relevant and incorrect or absent data means management by perception, not management by fact. In order to overcome this type of problem an organization needs an effective management information system.

2.19. Lack of flexible organizational structure

TQM needs less hierarchy in organizational structure. Organizational structure should be flatter, more horizontal, and less mechanic, more flexible. Reducing number of hierarchical levels with integration of teams into the organizational structure, supporting integration of working groups, reduction of supervision and giving adequate autonomy and resources to teams are important indicators of the advanced TQM approach (Angeles Escriba-Moreno and Canet-Giner, 2006: 162, 175).

High bureaucratic, mechanistic and authoritative organizations are not enough flexible to adopt TQM effectively. More importantly, after deploying TQM project if the organization is getting more hierarchical and work processes is getting more complex instead of getting leaner without producing any customer values and positive outcomes, that means something is going wrong and the project is likely to fail sooner or later. So, a special attention should be paid to structural transformations to support TQM processes.

Organizations should focus on elimination of processes and organizational levels which do not produce or exceed customer values and benefits. This effort result in simplification of the processes and leaner organizational structure.

2.20. Fear

Fear is related to uncertainty, changes, risks and expectations. According to Deming (1986) in an atmosphere of fear problem solving and employees' commitment do not take place. Fear has a negative impact on success of TQM implementation. Fear prevents any improvement measures, decrease motivation, constitutes barriers for cooperation, makes decision making process more difficult and prevents communication processes. So, fear should be eliminated to overcome its negative roles in implementing TQM (Bugdol, 2020: 1218-1233).

The literature shows that there are various causes of fear. Some of them are deprived from changes, losing power, loosing support, uncertainty, assessment, punishment, exclusion etc.

2.20.1. Fear of changes

At the very beginning stage of TQM implementation people may be afraid of changes. People may perceive changes as a threat to their current or future status. Being afraid of change may be result from other kind of fear such as losing power or position, loosing support of superior, losing benefits, lack of knowledge or sense of ambiguity. Therefore, top management should be aware of the necessity of organizational culture which eliminates or minimizes fear of the change from the workplace. In this manner an organizational culture which have proper communication channels and friendly work environment and supports development of competences helps reduce fear (Bugdol, 2020: 1221, 2032) and minimize resistance among staff.

2.20.2. Fear of empowerment

Employee empowerment is accepted as a management response to the highly complex and competitive market. Quality approaches has increased popularity of empowering employees (Hill and Huq, 2004: 1025). Empowering staff necessitates eliminating fear and bureaucratic obstacles that impede the decision-making process (Hochman, 2005: 467). Although TQM emphasises on empowering employees, lack of empowerment of employees is one of the difficulties for successful TQM implementation (Rawlani, 2020:55).

Empowerment makes fear for both superiors and subordinates, and this kind of fear usually takes place during structural changes or new project (Bugdol, 2020: 1226). Changes can risk especially middle level manager or heads of departments (Mosadeghrad, 2014: 165). Superiors, namely team leaders and middle level managers may not be really interested in redistribution of power (Hill and Huq, 2004: 1039), do not want to give up their current power or superiority. They may perceive empowerment as division of centralize power, that is an uncertainty or a threat for them. Therefore, superiors may resist to empower subordinates. For example, they may boycott the formation of quality circles and want to determine limits of quality circle leaders very precisely. Subordinates also may be afraid of losing support from superiors and taking responsibility of decision making (Andrade et al., 2017: 79).

Empowering employees does not mean only authorizing them to control their own works. But it also means providing them necessary resources, infrastructure and technical assistance to fix problems and encouraging them to find solutions (Ahire et al., 1996: 31). Empowering without adequate training will be useless. (Hug, 2005: 467).

2.20.3. Fear of previous experiences

If an organisational had some bad previous experiences with some programs such as management by objectives, reengineering, performance appraisal etc. and top management used these as excuses to fire out employees, people can be sceptical about TQM implementation and may not trust the top management.

Unsuccessful implementations outside organizations may also make staffs sceptical. Employees' attitude towards changes can be affected by the experiences, feelings and influences of staff of other organizations (Dooley & Flor, 1998: 157-174).

2.21. Lack of human resource policies and practices in alignment with TQM

Many aspects of TQM have clear links with human resource management, and they require carefully designed HR approach and strategies. Human recourses-oriented strategies in aligned with TQM plays a key role in successful implementation of TQM (Snape et al., 1995: 44-49; Chiarini & Baccarani, 2016: 385). For example, when we talk about waste management in a TQM project it has human resource management aspect. Because underutilization or mismanagement of workforce or staff competencies is a type of waste that must be considered by management. Organizations implementing TQM should pay necessary attention to human aspect of the organization. Job design and rolls, recruiting and selecting, teamwork, performance appraisal, payment, reward system, and employee motivation and satisfaction should be taken into consideration in the TQM implementation.

The quality culture begins by recruiting and selecting. Employees must have attitudes and behaviours consistent with TQM and use them into the quality culture (Snape et al., 1995: 45). Lack of motivation and reward system (Al Nahyan & All, 2017: 1; Akpoviroro, 2019: 309; Dilawo & Salimi, 2019: 1147; Bugdol & Piotr, 2020: 733) may result in failure of TQM implementation. Likewise, undefined roles and responsibilities (Dilawo & Salimi, 2019: 1147), low job satisfaction, high turnover (Al-Khalaf, 1997: 12) and lack of recognition (Al-Khalaf, 1997: 7; Al Nahyan & All, 2017: 1) may also cause failure or hinder success of TQM implementation.

Managers should recognize that there should be a link between new implementation and employees' current or future benefits. These benefits do not have to be tangible and monetary. they may be physiological or intangible. They do not have to paid in advance. But they may be related with their future expectations. Without securing employees' benefits, the TQM initiative is likely to be encountered resistance and fear.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

From the literature review, it can be concluded that there are numerous pitfalls which impede successful implementations of TQM. Numbers, frequency and types of barriers change from organisation to organisation and from sector to sector. Understanding of the pitfalls will contribute managers to overcome obstacles to a successful TQM implementation.

Which obstacle is the most important?" The answer depends on the situation. One pitfall may be the most important factor in a sector or a firm, other pitfall may be the most important factor in another sector or firm. If managers take all necessary actions except for example employee satisfaction or supplier relations that can result in failure of the implementation of

TQM or at least delay achievement of expected outcomes, that means the most important pitfall causes failure is employee dissatisfaction or mismanaged supplier relations. Therefore, each factor can be the most important factor depending on the circumstances.

More importantly, most obstacles are not independent from each other. Problems with the bottom line have roots from upper levels. For example, employee resistance or high turnover are not unique or independent obstacles. They have roots in upper levels. It can be asserted that there is only one real pitfall that rest of them results from it. Thus, success or failure of TQM program is a managerial issue rather than an individual issue. Most attempts to adapt TQM fails because of managerial incompetence. Competent managers can see the bigger organizational picture and foresee what works and what does not work in the organization. They know environmental, organizational and implementational requirement of a successful TQM implementation. Providing these is the top management responsibility.

As a conclusion, TQM is not a panacea. A right implementation with appropriate managerial competencies and necessary TQM tools in a supportive organizational environment most likely secure better result in a competitive business environment.

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