Research Paper

Application of Total Quality Management (TQM) in higher education: A review

Accepted 22nd February, 2018

ABSTRACT

Academic quality improvement in higher education has recently been considered in several higher learning institutes or universities all over the world. In changing world, which increasingly is adding to uncertainty, all higher learning institutes should provide favourable responses to social needs. Experience has proven that Universities can provide best services to the community if they have concerns on continuous improvement, commitment towards quality and leadership skills in the services. This paper deals with continuous improvement and quality commitment on higher education. Many of the institutions or universities teach TQM as one of the subject, but very higher learning institutes little followed TQM practices in their institutes.

Keywords: TQM practices, higher education, quality commitment.

INTRODUCTION

TQM is a journey that never ends. A change is the only permanent. TQM is a philosophy and strategy minded customer. The word total implies that all members of the organization make consistent efforts to achieve the objective for a customer through systematic efforts for the improvements. All employees must participate in the development of shared vision, mission and plan and in quests for continuous improvements. TQM is not an approach to get things done at any cost attitude. It is a systematic approach to quality and process improvement to delight the customers. The success of TQM is not easy from the organizational point of view. It is not possible to get full support from every member of the organization. Certain members of the organization will have suspicious mindset over management that may lead to higher requirements of output and decrease the manpower requirements.

TQM implementation is only in the range of 25 to 30% of those who have initiated the practice (Milflora, 1997). Even in Japan, when TQM was first initiated, there was lot of opposition by the work force or front liner. Hence, they are called front liners.

TQM was not successful in certain organizations due to sustainability of leadership and purpose, communications, team work for quality improvement and lack of total commitment to the TQM philosophy and practices.

The success of TQM is a philosophy which emphasizes continuous improvement as a process that places premium on achievement of customer satisfaction. This requires participation of everyone in the organization in the development of shared mission, vision, plans and in the quest for continuous improvements. A lot of problems and standard situations are solved in an Adhoc manner. The existing management systems in certain organizations are without necessary transparency and formalization (Dobrza and Roszak, 2008).

TQM EVOLUTION

TQM is a customer minded management philosophy and strategy. TQM has become part of the corporate management parlance on a global scale. While it was earlier regarded as buzz word, hype and fad, it is now considered as a must for survival and success (Jagadeesh, 1999). TQM is a way of managing to improve the effectiveness, flexibility and competitiveness of business as a whole. A message for serving customers with goodwill.
Figure 1: TQM model.

and respect was taught long ago by Mahatma Gandhi of India. According to him, customers are the most important visitors on our business premises. He is not dependent on us, we are dependent on him. He is not an interruption on our work, but rather, he is the purpose of it. He is not an outsider on our business; he is a part of it. We are not doing him a favour by serving him. He is doing us a favour by giving an opportunity to do so (Mehta, 1999; Kay and Hsien, 2002).

Figure 1 shows a basic model for TQM. In any business, continuous improvement is an important activity to sustain customers. That is, here customers mean students and parents. TQM is to determine the relationship between top management leadership, continuous improvement on teaching, employees’ empowerment, job satisfaction and customer satisfaction (Isaiah and Kofi, 2002).

TQM PRINCIPLES

TQM principles are the main factors to guarantee the implementation of TQM. TQM principles can be broadly classified into ten major headings. They are as follows:

1) Continuous improvement;
2) Commitment;
3) Leadership;
4) Total involvement - by employees’ empowerment and management;
5) Total customer satisfaction;
6) Training and education;
7) Ownership;
8) Reward and recognition;
9) Prevention of error;
10) Co-operation and team work.

All the aforementioned principles have to be implemented fully to ensure the success of TQM in any higher learning institutes organizations. Mohammad et al. (2011) stated that expectations for better performance, in terms of teaching and producing competent college graduates are increasing. Hence, educational planners whether in level of the University, college or department should pay attention to quality. In general, professionals with engineering and technology backgrounds should form an ethical group of knowledge of workers in the innovation. Quality assessment, employability and innovation are possible through engineering practices (PalPandi et al., 2012). In this paper, there are two principles that deal with continuous improvement and commitment is considered for discussion.

QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION – A CONCEPT

The people should understand quality easily and only with agreed understanding can quality and assurance be implemented. It is not easy to give simple answer for quality in education because not everyone shares the same ideas. When a person buying a car is judged depending on the size or specification, reliability, range of speed, safety measures built in, maintenance free, ease of manoeuvring during parking, fuel consumption and value for money etc, it also depends on the brand image, market share and collaboration. Understanding the quality of product or service can perhaps be the best. It is also a bundle of qualities. Different stakeholders will give less or more weightage to specific qualities. People in general, agree on
the features that constitute constant quality. It is also called meeting customer’s requirement or expectations. All Universities across the world strive for their excellence in teaching, research, services and acceptable facilities like library, laboratories and software and management system.

Excellence is an important component factor of quality in higher education. It is also accepted by most academics experts. It is not just enough for these facilities but also teaching faculties should be highly qualified, research oriented, should be an expert in their area of specialization un-doubtly and more important no ego clash with peers. The ego with peers will also affect the students and other functions. Those who are seeking funds for their higher education should also have quality of thinking that their children will get excellent education. Each University should say that they are offering value for money. It means that producing good outcomes for comparatively modest expenditure transformation; students are empowered and facts are transformed into new knowledge.

There are many ways of thinking quality in higher education. One of the more common ways of defining University quality is “fitness for purpose”. The mission of universities or institutions should be fit for purpose. In addition to fit for specific purpose, in an international context individual mission should exist in a higher education. The fit should be demonstrated to the world wide academic community. The products of all higher education universities or institutions are expected to make positive contributions to their international community and through employment opportunities, research work, personal conduct, social responsibilities and ability to learn through lives. For this reason, the fitness for purpose applies also to their educational institutions, that is, the idea that the mission of the universities must share common purposes and goals with those of other higher universities. In reality, it is important that there is no way in which quality in higher education will simply be equated to quantity of graduates. The quantity should be balanced against quality as graduates need to reach certain acceptable standard of achievement to make positive contributions. University or institutions should set standards and needs to be measured and assessed by some means. Such standards can be directed to outputs or outcomes, such as the quality of graduates produced or the quality of research publications. In general, it is becoming more widely accepted that higher education quality assessments will make complementary use of the concepts of both fitness of purpose and fitness for purpose.

CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Thinking about quality has progressed over time from ‘controlling quality’ in the 1950s, to ‘assuring quality’ in the 1980s, to managing for Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI’). The CQI approach views quality assurance as an integrated cyclical process that enables an organization to continually reflect on and improve its performance. One of the most commonly-used acronyms for a CQI cycle is PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) (Figure 2).

The PDCA model can be applied at all levels within an higher learning institutes and to particular activities: at the level of the institution as a whole; at faculty of divisional level; at unit level; for academic programs and for research. In fact, the PDCA approach should be intuitive for academics, as it reflects processes that will normally apply to giving a lecture or conducting research. (However, it must be stressed here that the quality assessments are assessments of institutions and not of individuals). At institutional level, the ‘Plan’ stage includes the trail from an organization’s mission, vision and values through to more specific goals and the planned arrangements on how these will be achieved. The latter may culminate in written policies and procedures. Some quality assessment questions include:

1) What outcomes a higher learning institutes or university is trying to achieve?
2) What reference points (internal or external) are used in establishing the organization’s objectives?
3) How does the organization plan to achieve its objectives?
4) Does it understand its context and capabilities?
5) Are there policies or processes or procedures consistent with the plans?
6) Are the policies and procedures consistent with the plans?
7) Are there structures and responsibilities appropriate for the plans?

At a university or institution level, the ‘Do’ stage considers whether and how effectively, the approaches from the ‘Plan’ stage are being put into effect. Most organizations are better at planning than at implementation. Some quality assessment questions include:

1) Have the plans been put into effect as intended?
2) Are the written policies actually carried out by staff? How does the University know?
3) Are staffs appropriately trained and resources appropriately deployed to fulfil the approaches?
4) What are the barriers to effective implementation?

At University or institutional level, the ‘Check’ stage looks at an institution’s results or outcomes as a means of determining how well the ‘Do’ stage is achieving the planned approaches. Some quality assessment questions include:

1) What results are achieved compared to the plans?
2) If the organization is not achieving its planned results, does it know why?
3) Does the organization understand why and how it achieved those particular results?
4) The results as a consequence of deliberate planning and action?
5) How are the results reported and used within the organization?

At an university or institutional level, the ‘Act’ stage focuses on whether the organization is actively and continuously engaged with understanding its performance and is using this understanding to bring about improvements. Some quality assessment questions include:

1) Does the organization know how it can improve and what it needs to improve?
2) How does it know this? (e.g. through the use of external benchmarks)
3) How is it acting upon this knowledge?
4) Does the organization have a demonstrated capacity to make improvements?

It is insufficient to conduct a quality assessment against only one of these stages due to their fundamentally integrated nature. For example, it is insufficient to assess only the ‘Do’ stage because this is meaningless without considering what the action was planned to achieve and what it actually is achieving. Similarly, it is insufficient to assess only the ‘Check’ stage because the stakeholders and the organization itself, need assurance that the results (and their consequential effects) are achieved by design rather than by accident. Moreover, even if results look impressive, perhaps they could be significantly better if the planning and implementation were more effective. It is for this reason, that is, the need for an integrated approach to quality assurance, as well as, the need to ensure a positive experience for students and staff, that the quality assessment standards address both processes and outcomes. Asking these types of questions about a particular institution or organizational unit or process is a constructive and improvement-focused approach that can help in the conduct of an institutional self-assessment.

**Commitment: Quality assessment, quality audit and institutional accreditation**

Quality assessments can be made against:

1) A university’s own goals and objectives;
2) A set of external standards;
3) Some combination of both.

For quality assessments of universities, it is proposed to conduct a check against a set of standards, while taking into account special missions of individual universities. The definition of ‘quality assessment’ is very similar to definitions used for quality audit and the processes for quality assessment. Both produce descriptive findings of the extent to which institutional arrangements meet some reference point, although in the case of quality audit, the reference point may be the institutions own mission and objectives rather than a set of external standards. Both make use of the concept of a continuous quality improvement cycle. However, unlike many quality audits, a
quality assessment will also include some form of overall evaluative judgment. This can be a ‘pass/fail’ grade or a description (for example, excellent, good, satisfactory and not yet satisfactory). In this respect and in the use of a set of standards, a quality assessment similar to an institutional accreditation is sometimes called registration or licensing. An ‘institutional accreditation’ is an evaluation of whether an institution qualifies for a certain status, for example, accredited or not accredited.

**TQM implementation**

TQM can be implemented effectively by:

1) Form teams as councils;
2) Train the lecturers;
3) Educate them on TQM principles;
4) Form internal customer teams;
5) Follow process and not finding immediate results;
6) Recognition for services and reward for individuals.

The points aforementioned are indications to implement TQM.

**FAILURES IN IMPLEMENTING TQM**

The TQM failed in many organizations due to misunderstanding of TQM principles. Even in Japan after the world war, quality concept was introduced, but many people feared that it is a means for terminating the appointments of employees. There are many reasons for which TQM was not successfully implemented and they are:

1) Chances of failures in TQM organization are always present. Top management with the wrong attitude and uncommitted to quality are some factors that leads to failures;
2) Non-commitment and unwillingness towards the organization, customers, employees and students welfare for the society;
3) Lack of enthusiasm and knowledge sharing among the all employees, ego and big brother attitude;
4) Lack of motivation and involvement of all the employees in their participation in achieving performance measures;
5) Lack of management commitment towards customer’s satisfaction;
6) Management interested in short gains only;
7) Lack of process orientation; TQM is a process based concept.

**CONCLUSION**

The following conclusions are made in the course of this research:

1) The university or institution should strive in improving quality of teaching with knowledgeable academicians, research publications and reach to societies;
2) TQM is based on improvement and not a rule or law. It is system;
3) Universities should have commitment on quality, and not quantity;
4) Universities or institutions should set standards for themselves for improvement on par with the competitive world.

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Cite this article as:


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