Total Quality Management Essay, Research Paper

Does TQM benefit employees?

As with almost all issues surrounding Total Quality Management, there is much confusion in academia as to whether TQM benefits employees. Much of the confusion arises from the difficulty of defining TQM. Academics and practitioners often disagree about the benefits (and even the objectives) of TQM.. Several quality “gurus’” and consulting firms are guilty of pushing a “condense(d) TQM theory” which has been simplified “to an easily imitated formula.” (Steel 17). All agree that with the introduction of TQM, employees tend to have more work. The question of what (or whether) the workers gain from the increased workload and challenge is pivotal to an assessment of TQM practices. Unfortunately, because of the lack of a commonly accepted definition-and the difficulty in measurement of effect-few academicians have focused research efforts in this area.

The theory of TQM is thought to have been a collaboration of the work of Crosby, Deming, Feigenbaum, Ishikawa, and Juran. Stephen Hill and Adrian Wilkinson, authors of “In Search of TQM” argue that there are three fundamental principles of Total Quality Management. The first is “customer orientation”. Much emphasis is placed on fulfilling clearly defined customer requirements. For example, employees are assigned both internal as well as external customers. The second principle is “process orientation.” For instance, work processes are broken down into basic tasks in an effort to reduce variability and improve quality. The final principle is that of “continuous improvement”. The best method for a work process can always be improved. There is emphasis on change identification and execution by the actual worker.

The academic community has focused little on TQM-largely because of the difficulty in assessing the effects of TQM on an organisation. It is difficult to prove that changes in an organisation are the result of the introduction of TQM. That workers are content or that profitability improves may be due to other events-subsequent to the introduction of TQM-such as increase in demand across an industry. “The research literature on TQM effects includes few studies whose designs permit definitive statements to be made about cause and effects.” (Hackman 324) Because of the lack of research there certainly is no definitive answer to the question of whether TQM increases employees’ job satisfaction.

Deming and Ishikawa identified three different sources of worker motivation associated with TQM initiatives. The first is “growing, learning, and developing one’s self.” (Hackman 327) J. Richard Hackman and Ruth Wegman, authors’ of “Total Quality Management: Empirical, Conceptual and Practical Issues”, emphasise that “TQM is pro-learning, with a vengeance.” (Hackman 330) TQM recommends creation of cross-functional quality teams. These teams allow members to encounter a variety of different perspectives which they would otherwise not encounter. TQM also emphasises employees learning new work processes, again helping the employees to grow. As a result, the organisation’s labour force achieves greater flexibility.

The second source of motivation cited by Deming and Ishikawa is “task motivation, the good feeling that comes from accomplishing things and seeing them actually work.” (Ishikawa, 1985; Deming, 1986; cited in Hackman 325) Employees are constantly challenged with TQM, for example to continuously improve work processes. This is clearly seen in the implementation of TQM at Pirelli Cables, examined in a case study written by P. Dawson. The author describes the creation of TQM teams, made up of 6 to 8 shopfloor volunteers and a facilitator. The team were challenged with a problem and given difficult but achievable targets. “Graphs showing efficiency rates are located next to machines undergoing investigation and were seen to provide a source of motivation for TQM teams.” (Dawson 79) The results of the teams appeared to be generally very good, as seen by the many tangible benefits mentioned in the case study.

Deming and Ishikawa also cite “social motivation, the energy that comes from cooperating with others on a shared task and the incentive provided by recognition from others.”(Ishikawa, 1985 and Deming, 1986 cited in Dawson 325-326) TQM stresses the importance of social interaction through its “emphasis on teamwork and cross functional relationships.” (Dawson 326) The employees at Pirelli Cable certainly appear to have benefited from the team projects. Dawson states that “the TQM Groups, in fostering a team spirit and breaking down traditional boundaries, represented the first step towards teamwork on the shopfloor.” (Dawson 79) Dawson praises the subjective benefits at Pirelli Cables, “such as the development of team spirit, commitment and the shopfloor acceptance of change.” (Dawson 80)

Although it certainly appears that TQM inevitably leads to employees doing more, this certainly does not necessarily mean that they are getting less. In fact, employees may enjoy the benefits of the increased workload, such as the challenge and education as well as the improvement of the social cohesiveness of the entire workforce. Jacqueline A-M. Coyle-Shapiro performed a longitudinal study on the impact of a TQM intervention on employee attitudes at a production unit of a U.K. supplier of engineering and electrical components.

employees gain increased satisfaction from working under TQM despite the

potential for TQM to require employees to increase their effort and responsibility

over work related issues. TQM may provide the mechanism to enhance their

(employees’) responsibility and influence on quality and improvement issues,

eliminate obstacles they experience in carrying out their work, and enhance the

feelings of job security. (Coyle-Shapiro, 157)

However, the author also states that the above is clearly not true for all employees.

One employee “benefit”-the use of performance pay in TQM-is controversial. As Elizabeth Morrison points out “rewards play a central role in a majority of organisations that have adopted TQM.” (Morrison 218) Use of rewards is one of the major differences between TQM theory and application. Deming argues strongly against the use of rewards. Research performed by Deci and Ryan (Deci 1985; cited in Morrison 221) suggests that Deming may have been right. Their research showed that external incentives such as performance pay may decrease intrinsic incentive to complete the task. The external incentive might make the employee feel as if he is being “controlled and to contribute their behavior to external pressure rather than intrinsic effort.” (Morrison 221) Therefore performance pay may actually reduce the positive benefits of the increased workload referred to earlier.

Critics of TQM argue that it results in employees doing more and getting less. David M Boje and Robert D Winsor present a scathing attack of every facet of TQM in “The Resurrection of Taylorism: Total Quality Management’s Hidden Agenda.” The authors argue that workers’ tasks are designed by management and meticulously controlled as seen similarly in scientific management.

TQM is extolled for its ability to indoctrinate workers into a rhythm of self-

surveillance and self control under the rubric of “returning control to the

workers.”"(Boje 61)

The authors argue that teamwork is used as a control mechanism. The members of the group apply pressure to other members when mistakes are made. Criticism from another member of the group faces far less opposition than that from management. Teaching employees multiple skills, the authors add, is only done as to eliminate any rest period for the worker, who upon finishing his or her task must now aid slower workers. Also, since absenteeism results in increased work for the group, workers pressure each other to not miss work. The attempt to create a new corporate “quality” culture is management’s “attempt to dominate the whole worker body, mind, soul, and aspirations.” (Boje 67)

Due to the lack of extensive research, any statement as to the benefits of TQM for employees is quite speculative. It is clear that at least in some cases, TQM increases job satisfaction. The criticism of TQM as a “resurrection of Taylorism,” although making a few intelligent arguments, seems rather extreme on the whole. Although it is certainly true that not all employees enjoy the benefits of more work, theory and the little research there is provides good reason to believe that employees are working harder and enjoying greater job satisfaction as well under Total Quality Management.