
DOES TQM HAVE A ROLE IN EDUCATION?

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INTRODUCTION

As the author of two books and numerous articles on the relationship between TQM and education (Sallis 2003) you would expect me to answer in the affirmative and to give as my rationale the fact that education at whatever stage, primary, secondary, tertiary or higher, is simply a service and like any service industry is capable of improvements in its quality to its various customers and clients. But if this is the case then why do so few institutions have mission statements that acknowledge their commitment to total quality management?

It may be simply that I and my fellow authors who have argued the connection (West-Burnham 1992, Murgatroyd and Morgan 1993) have simply been poor at marshalling our arguments but the truth is probably more to do with structural factors within educational systems rather than the strengths or weaknesses of the arguments. The enormous changes that higher education has undergone in recent years in terms of budgets, governance and especially external quality assessment regimes has meant that institutions have tended to be externally driven and have had less opportunity to consider their own management systems.

What I argue in this paper is that there are strong and compelling reasons for educational institutions to take the path of TQM and that these reasons can be summed up in my four imperatives for TQM.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP OF TQM TO EDUCATION?

Today's knowledge revolution has brought about rapid advances in technology. It has changed the way we work and think and is changing learning. To cope with the information age every person requires a high standard of education. High educational attainments are the right of each and every child throughout the world. To achieve this every person needs to have a quality education. This may seem like a pipe dream in many parts of the world, or even in the inner city schools of many western countries, but this is just the issue where TQM has its relevance. TQM in education has as its message the idea that every child has worth and demands the best possible chance in life. It is an aspiration as relevant in Calcutta or Nairobi as in London, New York or Beijing. It may sound utopia, but it is after all to dreams like these that education should aspire, and it was for dreams like these that the pioneers of TQM, Deming, Juran, Crosby, albeit in a different context, developed their ideas. The customers and clients of the education service (students, parents and the community) deserve the best possible quality of education. This is the moral high ground in education and one of the few areas of educational discussion where there is little dissent. It is the duty of educational professionals and administrators to have an overriding concern to provide the very best possible educational opportunities. As John West-Burnham has put it, "*it is difficult to conceptualise a situation where*

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anything less than total quality is perceived as being appropriate or acceptable for the education of children” (West-Burnham 1992).

TQM as a management model with its emphasis on leadership, strategy, teamwork, rigorous analysis and self-assessment has a universal message

If TQM is boiled down to its essential it consists of a number of elements. None of these are *startling or new*. The *trick* of TQM, the thing that makes it such a powerful management process, is that all of the elements are to be present and worked on in concert over a sustained period of time. There is no quick fix in making long-term improvement in quality especially in an area as difficult and intellectually challenging as education. The elements are listed below. When read together it is clear that they are demanding, challenging and all-embracing. They are effectively a new approach to the culture of learning.

- ❖ A institutional strong mission and strategic framework
- ❖ Strong institutional leadership that put the needs of students first
- ❖ Excellent teamwork amongst the staff of the institution (this parallels the famous quality circles in Japanese industry)
- ❖ An organisational culture that is open and consultative and allows faculty to make quality improvement decisions for their student within the overall strategic framework and goals
- ❖ A clear understanding throughout the institution of the importance of excellent customer care (this is sometimes defined as a students needs come first policy)
- ❖ A clear set of policies that give sanction to the quality improvement culture
- ❖ A clear set of performance indicators **through** which the success of the institution can be measured

- ❖ A benchmarking process that allows the institution to compare its performance to that of other institutions whose performance it wishes to emulate.
- ❖ A system of customer or client evaluation that stakeholder i.e. students, parents, employers how well they perceive they are doing. Such feedback instruments should feed into the self-assessment process
- ❖ A process of self-assessment or self-evaluation that is carried out by teams within the institution that measure strengths and weaknesses against targets and then produce action plans to build on strengths and reduce weaknesses

There are clearly elements of this that challenge deeply held practice in many higher education institutions. The very notion of teamwork often does sit comfortably with academics who see scholarship as a solitary and perhaps even competitive activity. TQM emphasises collaboration over competition and sees the students as the centre piece of the activity. This may conflict with the importance of research for many academics. Perhaps the problem is that the philosophies of the pioneers of the quality movement, Deming, Juran, and Crosby have not been translated very accurately into the practice of education. One wonders what W Edward Deming the famous exponent of TQM who introduced the quality message to the Japanese after World War II, might have made of some of the initiatives that are today heralded in the name of quality improvement? What might he have made of the somewhat ruthless regimes of school inspections that countries like the United Kingdom have introduced as their response to the need to improve quality? The third of Deming's famous 14 points reads *cease dependence on mass inspection to achieve quality*. While accountability is crucial and one of the drivers of quality improvement it has the ability to overwhelm the other drivers.

WHY TAKE THE PATH OF TQM?

When I first started researching quality I asked myself the question *why should an educational establishment want to be involved in TQM?* My research has led me to the conclusion that educational institutions are pursuing quality improvement for a number of important reasons. Some are linked with professional responsibility, while others result from the competition inherent in educational marketplaces or from the need to demonstrate accountability.

The four quality imperatives

I have called the results of this research the *four quality imperatives*. These imperatives reflect the complex environment in which educational institutions operate. They are the drivers and motivating forces that challenges any institution to take a proactive stance on quality.

The moral imperative

The customers and clients of the education service (students, parents and the community) deserve the best possible quality of education. This is the moral high ground in education and one of the few areas of educational discussion where there is little dissent. It is the duty of educational professionals and administrators to have an overriding concern to provide the very best possible educational opportunities.

The professional imperative

Closely linked to the moral imperative is the professional imperative. Professionalism implies a commitment to the needs of students and an obligation to meet their needs by employing the most appropriate pedagogic practices. Educators have a professional duty to improve the quality of education and this, of course, places a considerable burden on teachers and administrators to ensure that both classroom practice and the management of the institution are operating to the highest possible standards.

The competitive imperative

Competition is a reality in the world of education. We all need students and compete for the best. Educationalists can meet the challenge of competition by working to improve the quality of their service and of their curriculum delivery mechanisms. The importance of TQM to survival is that it is a customer-driven process, focusing on the needs of clients and providing mechanisms to respond to their needs and wants. Competition requires strategies that clearly differentiate institutions from their competitors. Quality may sometimes be the only differentiating factor for an institution. Focusing on the needs of the customer, which is at the heart of quality, is one of the most effective means of facing the competition and surviving.

The accountability imperative

Educational institutions have to meet the political demands for education to be accountable and demonstrate that they are meeting high standards. TQM supports the accountability imperative by promoting objective and measurable outcomes of the educational process and provides mechanisms for quality improvement. Quality improvement becomes increasingly important as institutions achieve greater control over their own affairs. Greater freedom has to be matched by greater accountability. Institutions have to demonstrate that they are able to deliver what is required of them.

Failure to meet even one of these imperatives can jeopardize institutional well-being and survival. If institutions fail to provide the best services they risk losing students who will opt for one their competitors. By regarding these *drivers* as anything less than imperatives we risk the integrity of our profession and the future of our institutions. We are in an era where parents and politicians are asking tough and uncompromising questions. For education as for industry, quality improvement is no longer

an option, it is a necessity.

WHAT STEPS ARE NEEDED TO MAKE TQM WORK?

Joss and Kogan have written about introducing TQM in the health care sector as follows - "Those embarking on quality assurance have a hard row to hoe. It requires efforts that are both intellectual and organisational, or even political. Any of the variants of TQM that have been noted or proposed involves a culture change...." (Joss & Kogan 1995). Culture change is probably the most difficult thing for an organisation to undertake especially ones as complex as those involved in education. However, there are a number of steps that can be taken to enhance a TQM culture.

Develop leadership and strategy

TQM requires a commitment from senior management for quality initiatives to succeed. 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 stakeholders, both internal and external, in the development of strategy
- the assessment and evaluation of the institution's effectiveness against the goals negotiated with customers.

Leadership and commitment to quality must come from the top. This is the 'iron law' of quality. All models of quality emphasize that without the drive of senior management quality initiatives will be short lived.

It is leadership that puts strategy into action

and communicates the vision to the staff. Stanley Spanbauer has argued that quality management requires a particular style of leadership, which he characterizes as *transformational management*. Spanbauer says that "*the function of management is to provide both the vision and the culture of a, mutually supportive environment in which teachers and managers realize that their individual successes are interlocked with team action - their achievements rise and fall together*" (Spanbauer 1992).

Involve stakeholders

A TQM culture is achieved by a continual striving to meet both internal and external stakeholders' needs and expectations. Stakeholders 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 analysed and used when taking decisions.

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). Unless this link between listening and action is established, the activity of sampling customer requirements has little purpose.

Appoint quality champions

Regardless of the actual position of this person in the hierarchy it is important that the designated quality facilitator should report

directly to the headteacher or principal. The champions do not undertake all the quality projects. Their role is to assist and guide teams in discovering new ways to tackle and solve problems. It is the responsibility of these people to publicize the programme, and to lead the quality steering group in developing the quality programme. The quality steering group must represent key interests and must have representation from the senior management team. Its role is to drive and support the quality improvement process. It is both the powerhouse of ideas and the initiator of projects.

Ensure that the senior management team monitor progress

The senior management team will not be committed to the process unless they are well informed about both the philosophy and the methods of quality management. It is as necessary to build up a well-integrated and robust senior management team that can set an example to the teams in the rest of the institution

Train staff

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's armoury.

It is important in the initial stages of implementation that everyone is trained in the basics of TQM. Staff need a 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.

In Thriving on Chaos Tom Peters, having analysed the success of a number of major US companies, comes up with the exhortation '*Train everyone - lavishly*'. Peters provides a prescription for what constitutes a successful organizational training programme. Training should be used as the flagship for strategic change. He argues that management in the future will flow through empowering visions and shared values. Training is a prime opportunity to underscore the organization's values. To do this top management must be closely involved in the design of training programmes.

Communicate the TQM message

The strategy, relevance and benefits of TQM need to be effectively communicated. There can be a great deal of misunderstanding about the purpose of quality. The long-term nature of the programme needs to be made clear, as do the reasons for embarking on it. Staff development, training and team building are some of the most effective means of achieving it. Staff need to be regularly informed with either special newsletters or regular reports in the in-house journal. The importance of good communications and their feedback to management cannot be overemphasized. It is important to highlight good practices so that positive attitudes and goodwill can be drawn on. An institution will need to find its champions and leaders and to recognize their successes. Achievement needs to be celebrated, and there needs to be public recognition of good work. This does not have to be monetary recognition, but the motivational effects of public recognition and praise should not be underestimated. All the staff need to be involved in the quality process.

The importance of a clear and positive communications strategy also cannot be overstated. An organization has to know what it is about and what constitutes the quality it is seeking to improve. Dale and Boaden (1994) have made the point that management has to

share the strategy and outline to employees what needs to be done to make mission statements and strategy documents a reality. Without clear thinking and thoughtful communication, energy can be misdirected and wasted. Too often institutions concentrate on doing things rather than doing the right things. W Edwards Deming has summed up these phenomena in his terse phrase *having lost sight of our goals we redoubled our efforts*.

Measure the costs of quality

It is important to know both the cost of implementing the quality programme and the costs of not undertaking it. The costs of ignoring the quality message could involve lost enrolments, student failures, damage to reputation, lost opportunities, etc. The exercise is important as it highlights many of the reasons for pursuing quality improvements and provides a motivation for sticking with the programme.

Develop teamwork

Teamwork is the element that links teacher professionalism to the quality development process. It is the framework in which innovation and change become an accepted fact of life. Without teamwork quality development cannot be instituted (Schotles et al, 1990). The key aspect of teamwork in this framework is recognition of the internal customer chain. The successful organizational structure of a quality college rests on the mutual recognition of other people's roles within the institution and the need to deliver services internally to agreed standards. Teaching a modern curriculum requires the close integration of academic staff together with support staff, particularly learning resource professionals.

Teams can be seen as the engine of quality improvement. They make quality management work. Teams can clarify issues and ideas, and they are the means by which conflicts over direction and policy can be constructively handled. Working in teams can provide every

person in the organization with a means of expressing their views and making a contribution to the quality improvement process. A number of different types of teams are needed to produce quality improvements. As well as the more familiar curriculum teams, it is important to use *ad hoc* teams to tackle urgent quality issues.

Apply quality tools and techniques

This approach focuses on getting things done and achieving initial successes. It focuses on the things that the institution knows it has to improve, and selecting the correct tools to tackle them. Starting a TOM process by tackling problems head on avoids TQM paralysis. The danger is that it is easy to run out of steam or for the initiative to flounder if problems are difficult to resolve. If this approach is adopted it needs to be closely followed by a thorough analysis and a more strategic approach. Nevertheless, it may be useful to demonstrate those important first achievements.

Projects are best tackled by teams, and they should be encouraged to tackle problems and issues close to home. Tom Peters believes that organizations *should encourage pilots for everything* (Peters 1987). Pilots have the advantage of speeding up innovation, providing sources of excitement and interest. When setting-up improvement action teams or task groups, it is important to recognize that some issues can only be tackled by cross-organizational improvement teams. These are probably best set up as *ad hoc* groups given the brief to tackle a particular problem according to a fixed timescale. They have the additional advantage of helping to engender greater organizational collaboration.

Teams can start by analysing workflow and the existing processes and methods and their results. Usually the process of analysis highlights areas that need improvement and provide the initial agenda for the improvement programme. It is important that teams be supported with training in teamwork, problem-

solving and the use of tools if they are to be successful in their task.

Develop a self-assessment culture

An institution should have a means for evaluating its total performance. External inspectors may undertake this. However, the institution may decide to undertake its own audit. Staff can assess areas other than their own. Outsiders may be included in the audit. A system of peer review can build confidence and trust, and can act as significant staff development. Mechanisms need to be developed to feed the results of this auditing back into the strategic planning processes.

Feedback loops are vital for assessing and assuring quality. The quality system will need to document the evaluation mechanisms that the institution has in place to monitor both the achievement of individuals and the success of its programmes. The participation of the learner in the assessment of their own progress and their experience of the programme is an important element in this assessment. The methods might include records of achievement, review meetings, questionnaires, and internal audits. Whatever the method employed, it must be appropriate to the process.

Regular review and evaluation need to be an integral part of the programme. The steering group should undertake regular reviews and the senior management team should consider their reports and carry out its own monitoring. No new initiatives should be undertaken until the successes and failures of the existing ones are fully understood.

CONCLUSION

TQM fits well into the general philosophy, although less frequently the practice of education. The ideas of client-centredness, which are at the heart of the total quality approach, are in tune with much educational philosophy. All institutions claim to be pupil or

student centred. The difference between this aspiration and a total quality institution is that of a comprehensive framework to assure that promises to customers are met. The gaps between intention and assuring quality arise, in part, because educational institutions have, in general, been excellent in responding to external change, but often have lacked the time and the mental resource to plan their own long-term strategy and develop their own standards. A total quality approach, whether the initials TQM are adopted or not, will be necessary for the future corporate health and survival of institutions. A clear identity, well-defined standards and customers' entitlements are necessary features of self-confident institutions. Institutions will need to find the time to plan for their own and their customers' future.

They will need to produce a coherent and integrated approach to quality management that harnesses the commitment and goodwill of staff. Motivation, expertise and enthusiasm assure quality, not appraisal and inspection. The quality improvement programme must involve all that work in the institution. Everybody is responsible for the quality of the service they deliver, whether they are institutional managers, teachers or staff in support roles. Harnessing commitment from staff and channelling it into improvements is a major aspect of TQM. Quality systems must be vehicles for assisting staff to solve their own problems not as means of controlling them. It is all too easy to turn a quality system into a means of control rather than empowerment. It is important to remember that people produce quality, and to ensure that there are practical means of recognizing their achievements. Educationalists need to keep in mind that the quality message is in essence extremely simple. Quality is about doing the ordinary things extraordinarily well.

No institution can purchase TQM off the peg. It has to be customized so that it harmonizes with and develops from the existing culture. TQM should be developed from existing good practice within the institution. Quality already exists in

educational institutions. What TQM does is to build on existing quality and develops it into continuous quality improvement. Industrial models can be drawn on to provide useful pointers and examples. However, it is important to ensure that any approach used is realistic, workable and affordable. It needs to be remembered that introducing total quality requires perseverance. TQM is not something that can be introduced overnight. Nor is it a miracle cure. It does not provide instant success, and it does not solve all the problems. It will throw up new difficulties and challenges. It is a slow process, but the benefits are long term.

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