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# TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN EDUCATION

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“Quality is never an accident. It is always the result of intelligent effort. It is the will to produce a superior thing.”

■ John Ruskin

*Education is increasingly being viewed around the world as investment. The challenge of the knowledge society and the information explosion demand a fundamental rethinking of the traditional conceptions of knowledge, its ‘transmission’ and ‘delivery’ by teachers and ‘acquisition’ by students. All the areas of knowledge and skill present major challenges for education and calls for change. Change requires rethinking, appraisal, evaluation of accepted practices, challenging what has always been done and accepted. Change often requires both restructuring and transforming the cultures of educational institutions. TQM provides an excellent framework for this transition. Educational institutions should be a ramp to the highway of the future, not a dead-end street into the past.*

## The Concept of Quality

We live in an era where quality is of prime importance. It is indeed paradoxical that we all know quality because we experience it, yet we find it difficult to describe or explain what quality is. In our day to day life, when quality is regularly provided, we often take it for granted. However, we become aware of it only when quality is lacking. We recognize the importance of quality when we experience the frustration and the waste of time and effort associated with its absence. Quality certainly is what makes the difference between a product or a service being excellent or poor. Increasingly, quality makes the difference between success and failure.

Quality has been the goal of an eternal quest through the corridors of human history. It has been the driving force for all human endeavors. Quality has a variety of ambiguous and contradictory meanings. Much of the ambiguity over the meaning of quality arises because it can be seen both as an absolute and as a relative concept. The implications of absolute quality products are the expensiveness, uniqueness and prestige that set the owners apart from those who cannot afford them. Relative quality becomes evident when similar products and/or services of the same organization are compared over a given time and

place (Mukhopadhyay, M, 2002).

The world of business provides a lot of insight into quality. Quality may be defined as ‘the ability of a product or service to meet or exceed customer expectations’. Organizations which have embarked on the journey towards continuously improving quality know that much of the secret of quality stems from listening to and responding to the needs and wants of their customers and clients. Quality, no doubt, involves doing many other things well, but unless an organization puts its customers first, the preconditions for developing quality will not exist.

## Total Quality Management

The concept of Total Quality Management (TQM) was developed by an American, W. Edwards Deming, after World War II for improving the production quality of goods and services. The concept was not taken seriously by Americans until the Japanese, who adopted it in 1950 to resurrect their postwar business and industry, used it to dominate world markets by 1980. TQM is a philosophy that involves everyone in the organization in a continual effort to improve quality and achieve customer satisfaction. There are two key philosophies in TQM: one is

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continual improvement or a never ending push to improve; the other is the goal of customer satisfaction. The *total* in TQM means that everything and everybody in the organization is involved in the pursuit of continuous improvement. The *quality* in TQM means to see that customers' stated and implied needs are fully met. The *management* in TQM means everyone is fully committed, because everyone in the organization, whatever their status, position or role, is the manager of their own responsibilities.

It is important to understand that TQM is neither inspection nor imposition. It can neither be done *to* an organization nor *for* an organization. Rather, it can be done *in* the organization. For TQM to succeed, an organization must itself have the want to introduce it. It is about always trying to do things right first time and every time, rather than occasionally checking if you have gone wrong. TQM is all about doing it right the first time, every time. TQM is not about working to someone else's agenda, unless customers and clients of the organization have specified the same agenda. It is not something that only senior managers do and then pass their directions down the organizational hierarchy. It involves a lot of teamwork and everybody in the organization is equally responsible for continuous improvement.

The compulsion of the business environment on an organization today is not merely to do well, but to do better than competitors. The situation is so challenging that organizations are being compelled to introduce new strategies for superior performance and this is the goal of the TQM system. This calls for rethinking and reworking an organization's existing processes, position and attitudes so as to transform the organization to cope with the changing business context – where the customer is sovereign.

### Total Quality Environments

The signature features of total quality environments are the "three Cs"—a focus on *Customers*, *Culture*, and *Capacity* for continuous improvement. A large number of successful business organizations have focused on the three Cs and have used them to rejuvenate their businesses. As described in the National Alliance of Business publication, *The Cutting Edge of Common Sense: Total Quality, Education, and Systemic Change* (1993):

- **The Customer:**....total quality really has two kinds of customers in mind—the external customers, who "consume" the product or service offered, and the internal customer, i.e., those who, in the process of creating a product or service, receive the output of another's work, with each successive person adding something of value....if everyone does his or her job in a way that eliminates problems for the next person up the line, the final customer...will be satisfied....

- **The Culture:** A successful change strategy involving quality management also involves a commitment to create a specific kind of organizational culture based on trust and shared decision making....
- **The Capacity:** Leaders in quality-oriented companies seek ways not merely to change but to manage and instill the change process itself: in Deming's terms, they achieve "constancy of purpose".

In any organization, total quality is about systemic change. The "lead actor" in TQM is...the process of systemic change itself...The point is to develop the organization as an integrated, organic set of relationships, and to gain the ability to change and direct those relationships again and again in the direction of improvement—as defined by the organization's internal and external customers. (www.nwrel.org)

### Relevance of TQM in Education

Quality is the single most important issue in education, business and government today. Students graduate from school or college unprepared to meet the demands of society. This problem has a ripple effect throughout society. Students who are not prepared to become responsible, productive citizens become a burden to society. These students, products of an education system which does not focus on quality, increase social welfare costs. They are not prepared to meet the needs of the next generations and may feel alienated from society. Education must undergo a paradigm shift. Education must help students develop the skills they need to compete in a global economy (Arcaro, J, 1995).

There is a misconception that quality is linked with accountability: if a school comes out well on tests, grades and scores, it must possess quality. So the quest for quality becomes the imposition of benchmarks, the incorporation of best practice 'out of context' and the relentless pursuit of management objectives defined as targets and results. But a school may do well on such measures, simply because it is teaching to the test. The curriculum may be impoverished, yet will satisfy the demands of accountability. According to Winch (1996), the accountable school may lack quality. Quality cannot be a matter of fulfilling performance targets (Hoy, 1999).

The best organizations today, whether public or private, whether in the manufacturing sector or service sector understand quality and are in the pursuit of total quality. Education has also recognized the need to pursue it, and to deliver it to students. The concept of TQM can be applied to academics. Total Quality Management is both a philosophy and a methodology. It can assist educational institutions to manage change and to set their own curriculum to deal with the plethora of new external

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pressures. However, TQM does not and will not bring results overnight; neither is it a panacea for all the problems that face educational institutions. Rather it is an important set of tools that can be employed to provide quality education in institutions. The quality of education is judged by the kind of humans it produces. TQM can provide the focus for education and society. It establishes a flexible infrastructure that will help institutions adapt to the changing demands of society.

The knowledge revolution has been taking place at an incredible pace. It has changed the way we work and think and has changed learning too. Knowledge revolution has also triggered rapid advances in technology. Knowledge is rapidly replacing raw materials and labor as the most critical input for success of any organization. It has become the most valuable asset of any organization. Education and knowledge are at the centre stage of any development process. This is significant because more than half of the GDP of developing countries like India is knowledge-based. The rise of the knowledge economy at a global level has reinforced education as the key economic and business driver.

In order to cope with the knowledge revolution, there is, indubitably, a huge demand for high standards of education. High educational attainments are the right of each and every child throughout the world. To achieve great heights in education, every child needs to have access to quality education. This is the issue where TQM has its relevance. TQM as a management model, with its emphasis on leadership, strategy, teamwork, rigorous analysis and self-assessment, has a universal message. TQM in education has, as its message, the idea that every child is an asset and therefore every child demands the best possible chance in life. It is an aspiration which is relevant in any part of the world. A child gets the best possible chance in life when he is provided quality education. The idea may sound utopian, 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, like Deming, Juran and Crosby, albeit in a different context, developed their ideas (Sallis, E, 2002)

### **The Imperatives for TQM in Education**

The globalization of education, migration of students from one community to other, from one country to another are adequate causes for concerns to educationists and administrators. Total Quality Management in education is a timely tool, which must be clearly understood, adopted and implemented.

Educational institutions pursue quality improvement for a variety of reasons. Some of the reasons are linked with professional responsibility, while others result from the intense competition

inherent in the educational market or from the institution's need to demonstrate accountability. Edward Sallis, in his book 'TQM in Education', suggests four imperatives that reflect the complex environment in which the educational institutions operate. These imperatives are the drivers and motivating forces that challenge any institution to take a proactive stance on quality.

**Moral imperative:** The customers and clients of the education service (students, parents and the community) deserve the best possible quality of education. It is the duty of educational professionals and administrators to have an overriding concern to provide the very best possible educational opportunities.

**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.

**Competitive imperative:** Competition is a reality in the world of education. Falling enrolments can lead to staff redundancies and ultimately the viability of the institution can be under threat. 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.

**Accountability imperative:** Schools and colleges are part of their communities and, as such, they must meet the political demands for education to be more accountable and publicly demonstrate the 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.

An institution's reputation and even survival can be jeopardized if it fails to meet even one of these imperatives. Any institution

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which fails to provide the best educational services carries the enormous risk of losing students, as these students may, in all probability, opt for one of 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 we are answerable to the society: where students, parents and political parties are asking tough and uncompromising questions. For education as for industry, quality improvement is no longer an option; it is a necessity (Sallis, E, 2002).

### **Supplier - Customer Relationship**

In a TQM organization, every individual in the organization is both a customer as well as a supplier. Every individual is a 'link in the chain'. This emphasizes that a lot of teamwork and collaboration is essential for TQM. The synergistic relationship between the suppliers and the customers suggests that pooling of talent and experience of individuals leads to enhancement of performance and achievement.

In an educational institution, the equivalent of an industry's workers is the teacher-student teams. The ultimate objective of education must be to develop a student's capabilities, interests and character, resulting in all round development of the student. This may be seen as the product of the teacher-student teams. Viewed in one sense, the teacher is the supplier and the student is the customer. The school and the teachers are the suppliers of an effective learning environment, systems and tools to the students. The student is the recipient of all the educational services provided by the educational institutions for the student's growth and improvement ([www.stedwards.edu](http://www.stedwards.edu)).

The school or the educational institution is responsible for the long term welfare of the students. It is the school which teaches the student how to learn and communicate in high quality ways, how to assess quality in their own work and in that of others, and how to invest in their own lifelong and life-wide learning processes by maximizing opportunities for growth in every aspect of daily life. In another sense, the student is also a worker, whose product is essentially his or her own continuous improvement and personal growth. Traditionally, education has been prone to individual and departmental isolation. These outdated practices will no longer help an institution cover much distance in its pursuit of total quality management.

The notion of the student as the institution's primary customer provides an important guiding principle for many of today's educational reforms. This philosophy represents a major paradigm shift from process to product.

### **Continuous Improvement and Self-Evaluation**

The main vehicle in TQM for achieving the highest level of performance is continuous improvement. Learning, creativity, innovation are all essential components of continuous improvement process. Continuous improvement needs a culture of working by 'thinking outside the box'. Creativity emerges not from individual intelligence but by teamwork nurtured by good leadership. This change in work context when adapted becomes learning. Continual improvement and learning should be a regular and uninterrupted part of work culture in the organization.

Within a total quality school setting, administrators or the management work collaboratively with their customers, the teachers. Gone are the ages of "scientific management" where the watchwords were compliance, control and command. The foundations for this system were fear, intimidation, and an adversarial approach to problem-solving. Total Quality is, essentially, a win-win approach which works to everyone's ultimate advantage.

One implication of this TQM principle for education involves an increased emphasis on training, "quality circles" (in which everyone involved discusses ways for improvement), research (especially classroom research) and communication (with students, parents, business leaders, community representatives, and so forth).

Self-evaluation is an integral part of total quality management. Glasser (1992, 180) explains the importance of self-evaluation in a quality organization: The main difference between happy and unhappy people is that happy people mostly evaluate their own behavior and constantly attempt to improve what they do. Unhappy people, on the other hand, mostly evaluate the behavior of others and spend their time criticizing, complaining, and judging in an attempt to coerce them into "improving" what they do. A quality organization, therefore, will consist of many more happy than unhappy people ([www.stedwards.edu](http://www.stedwards.edu)).

Today, it is in our best interest to encourage everyone's potential by focusing on the continual improvement of our own abilities and those of the people with whom we work and live. In his fourteen points on management, Deming stresses on driving out fear and breaking down barriers that inhibit communication and also stresses on abolishment of annual or merit rating.

### **Process Management**

A process is how inputs are transformed into value added products and services for customers. A process perspective links people in the chain of production and delivery systems, catering to 'internal customers' by means of customer-supplier

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relationship in the process line itself. The organization must be recognized as a system and the work done by people in the organization must be seen as ongoing processes.

A system is a network of independent components that work together to try to accomplish the aim of the system. A system must have an aim which is clear to everyone in the system. Without an aim, there is no system. The aim must include plans for the future. It is important that a system be managed as, left to themselves, components become selfish and competitive.

It is the management's job to direct the efforts of all components toward the aim of the system. The first step is clarification: everyone in the organization must understand the aim of the system, and how to direct his efforts toward it. Everyone must understand the damage and loss to the whole organization from a team that seeks to become a selfish, independent, profit centre (Deming, 1993).

In the context of an educational institution, the primary implication of this principle is that individual students and teachers are less to be blamed for failure than the system in which they work. Rather than finding out who is culpable when something goes wrong, all effort must be focused on root cause analysis – the reason for failure. The system must be examined to identify flawed processes in the systems and adequate steps must be taken to eliminate any flaws in the process that allows its participants to fail. People are not to be blamed for quality failures, the onus must be placed on the management for improving the processes. Since the system comprises of a number of processes, the improvements made in the quality of those processes determine the quality of the system as a whole as well as the quality of the resulting product (www.stedwards.edu).

In the new paradigm of learning, continual improvement of learning processes based on learning outcomes replaces the outdated "teach and test" mode. The quality of teaching/ learning processes then becomes mirrored in learning outcomes. Therefore, focusing attention on results is premature, and possibly counterproductive, without prior focus given to the processes designed to bring about desired results.

## **Leadership**

The success of TQM is the responsibility of top management. Therefore, the management must establish the context in which students can best achieve their potential through the continuous improvement that results from teachers and students working together. In order to effectively lead the institution, top management must be committed to provide empowerment and training to employees and regard them as valuable

resources of the institutions. Training is important for improving the knowledge, skill and motivation level of staff. Empowerment refers to providing opportunities to learn and practice new skills, to exercise options and for decisions in problem solving. Training adds value to the latent skills of the teachers but it is empowerment that releases the latent force to perform for best results.

In order to generate quality in education, it is important to have excellence in leadership. A passion for excellence cannot be communicated from behind the office desk. Both the visibility of leaders and their understanding and feeling for the front-line and the processes of the institution are prerequisites. Leadership is about communicating the vision and the values of the institution to others, and getting out among the staff and the customers and experiencing the service for themselves.

Educational leaders who create total quality school environments know that improving test scores and assessment symbols is less important than the progress inherent in the learning processes of students, teachers, administrators and all of the school's stakeholders. In the same way that a school's leaders set the tone for their school's teaching culture, teachers set the tone for their classroom's learning culture. Teachers provide the leadership, framework, and tools necessary for continuous improvement in the learning process (www.stedwards.edu).

## **Conclusion**

Quality does not come 'gift-wrapped': rather, it needs consistent involvement by all in the process of developing students' learning. There are many sources for quality in education. Among these are:

- Excellent examination results
- A well balanced and challenging curriculum
- Outstanding teachers
- High moral values
- Application of latest technology
- The support of parents, business and the local community
- Strong and purposeful leadership

In education, as in business, quality is difficult to define and measure, but its absence is often, all too obvious. One person's idea of quality often conflicts with another and no two experts ever come to the same conclusion when discussing what makes an excellent school, college or university. Quality in education systems is not just about the difference between being excellent or ordinary or between success and failure. TQM is about creating a quality culture where the aim of every member is to delight

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their customer and where the structure of the organization allows them to do so. Transforming the culture of a school, college, department or institution may be a slow process, but TQM provides an excellent framework for this transition. The transformation to a Total Quality Institution begins with a shared dedication to quality by the management, administration, faculty, staff, students, parents and community.

Education must be valued for the contribution it makes to developing students as responsible citizens who are better prepared to meet future academic and business challenges. It is crucial that educational institutions focus on what their internal and external customers want and then build systems and horizontal processes that are capable of delivering desired results. This is achieved by not only articulating what customers (both internal and external) want but by designing systems and processes within the institution where concern for customer needs get embedded in the institution's processes and related activities. It will take dedication, focus and a constancy of purpose to bring about total quality in education.

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