

A Study on how Total Quality Management (TQM) can be used in the Operations of an Institution

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Abstract

In this competitive world organizations are continuously improving their effectiveness and efficiency in their operations to enable them deliver the desired product and service consistently meeting their customer's needs and expectations with confidence. This article focuses on how Total Quality Management (TQM) can be used in the operations of an institution with emphasis on institutions of higher learning such as universities.

The details in this article is entirely collected through secondary research, specifically from scholarly articles in finance and management, various text books in finance and management and journals from professional bodies such as the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM).

Keywords: Total Quality Management, Quality assurance scheme, Quality circles, Continuous improvement, Getting things right first time, Management Commitment, Employee Empowerment, Customer Focus.

Introduction

This article details how Total Quality Management (TQM) can be used in the operations of an Institution with emphasis on institutions of higher learning. It discusses the principles of Total Quality Management as well as the specific processes and activities where it is used and how it is used. The conclusion spells out the benefits that an institution can obtain when they introduce and implement Total Quality Management (TQM).

What is Total Quality Management (TQM)?

The basis on which total quality management (TQM) works is that the quality of processes and service is the responsibility of all the persons that are part of the consumption and creation of services provided by an entity. To meet or exceed customer expectations there should be the involvement of for instance customers, workers, managers and supplier. It is a major assumption one which total quality management is based. The notion is to improve the way in which members of institution work and that all members of the institution are

involved in improving processes and services. Integration of the quality principles into activities of the institution and the culture of the institution are products of tools such effective communication, strategy and data that TQM uses. TQM aims to ensure that products and services are produced to a level of quality that meets or exceeds customer expectation “BPP Learning Media, Page 215, 2011”

The basic principles of Total Quality Management (TQM)

The basic principles of Total Quality Management (TQM) are discussed below coupled with how an institution can use them to gain competitive edge.

Getting things right first time

The principle of getting things right first time is on the basis that the cost of correcting mistakes is greater than the cost of preventing them from happening in the first place. An institution will use this principle to ensure that quality services are offered to learners the very first time they are offered. Apart from employing experienced lecturers, an institution can for instance be arranging workshops before lectures begin to offer knowhow on matters such teaching methodology, curriculum development and etc. with the aim of conducting lecture right the first time they do it. Furthermore the institution can be offering training to members of staff that are unqualified. Through TQM it is possible to obtain defect-free work first time on consistent basis “BPP Learning Media, Page 108, 2007”.

Continuous improvement

Continuous improvement is the belief that it is always possible to improve, no matter how high quality may be already. For instance members of staff at an institution of high learning should not be content with level of services they offer to the students. They should be aiming to offer a better service the next time they do so than the service offered in the past. In other words there should be always room for improvement in the services offered. This works on the assumption that no matter how well we perform our duties there will always be limitations in what we do and therefore we should be focusing to be better in the services we offer compared to the previous time the same services were offered. Conducting workshops, seminars and training programmes will be important in institution of higher learning so that can obtain maximum benefits from the principle of continuous improvement, which the institution should be encouraged to emulate.

The Other Principles of Total Quality Management

Apart from the two basic principles of Total Quality Management (TQM) stated above, other important principles of TQM are as follows:

Management Commitment

Changing in the way activities are carried out in an institution needs a champion and the champion in this case is management. Without the commitment of management, the change to using TQM in processes and activities would not be successful. Management's commitment to TQM is through long term commitment and leadership. Managers act as role models as well as leading and empowering change. The manager's aim is to focus on success through people and therefore they need to be seen to be in the forefront to support positive change, such as the use of TQM in all of the institution's processes and activities.

Employee Empowerment

An institution needs ensure that employees are empowered through training, suggestion scheme, teamwork and measurement and recognition. The institution should recognize that there is need to encourage and empower employees to adopt ownership of their output and improvement actions. Managers should ensure that every employee in the company is responsible for quality.

Customer Focus

The services offered to students should be customer focused; ensuring quality services to customers and customer driven standards are not compromised. This can be particularly enhanced through for instance supplier partnership and supplier quality assurance scheme for the supply of certain facilities that enhance the learning environment. Companies are becoming customer driven and making customer satisfaction an overriding priority "BPP Learning Media, Page 107, 2007".

Fact Based Decision Making

To avoid biasness TQM is mainly focused on fact based decision making by use of various tools for decision making and decisions will be based on facts.

Process Centered

TQM focuses on processes and systems created in the institution rather than people in the institution emphasizing that it is the processes are the problem not people.

Quality must be Measurable

Quantifying results is one of the measures on which the effectiveness of quality management is based. This enables management to take a glance on how the process is implemented and if the effects desired are being attained as well as helping to set goals for the future and ensuring that every department is working towards achieving results desired. In an

institutions of higher learning measures such as the pass rate of students, retention of knowledge, timely delivery of study materials, publications and so on.

Quality is a Long-Term Investment

This can be best explained by the preposition “Don’t treat symptoms, look for the cure”. The institution should focus on working towards real long-term success, because TQM is a long-term investment and its design is based on helping to find long term success. Quality management is therefore not a quick fix. In an institution of learning this may particularly apply to the curriculum design of programmes. The design of an academic programme should stand the test of time, for instance experts in specified areas of study should be involved in the design of programmes and this may take some reasonable time to complete.

How an Institution can apply TQM in its Processes and Activities

TQM as a management technique is applicable to all of the institution’s activities, including conduction of lectures by lecturers. It will thus be applied to all of the instruction’s activities and specific examples are stated and discussed below.

In relation to the design of academic programmes

Processes and programmes should be designed with quality in mind so that possibilities of mistakes are minimized from the initiation in operation of the programmes and the processes. Like already stated above quality is not quick fix and therefore the institution should every its capacity to ensure that programmes are correctly designed from the beginning. The institution should ensure specifications for programmes are correct.

In relation to the provision of services

The quality of input in the delivery of services will have an effect on the quality of output. TQM would require measures to be set up to determine whether the services offered are acceptable or unacceptable, especially lectures offered to students. Consideration such as the qualifications and experience of lecturers should be taken into as well as the learning environment in totality e.g. the conduciveness of the lecture rooms in terms of size, temperature and availability of facilities that add to the quality of lectures.

In relation to satisfaction by students

This will necessary to resolve situations where the institution is offering sub-standard educational services. The institution should provide room for customer complaints. Customer complaints should be monitored in the form of letters of complaint. In a number of institutions of higher learning in Zambia the common way students evaluate lecturers is through the evaluation forms which are given to students to fill in. Furthermore suggestion boxes can also be used to monitor what students require the institution to improve on in terms

of service delivery. This will enable the institution to offer services that are tailored to the needs of students.

In relation to suppliers

The Institution should establish supplier quality assurance scheme so that suppliers should guarantee the quality of goods they are supplying. This would be applicable to goods such as books for the library, stationery, food staffs for the canteen and other goods that will contribute to the better learning environment of the students.

This places the supplier with the responsibility to carry out the necessary quality checks or else the contract to supply various goods to the institution may be cancelled. This is essential in offering an edge to the institution to sustain its growth and satisfy the students. In addition the institution can engage in supplier partnership with its suppliers ensuring that matters such as the quality of goods are maintained by suppliers when it comes to the supply of goods. In this manner quality services to the customers can never be compromised as customer driven standards are maintained, ensuring that the services offered to customers are customer focused.

In relation to employees

Quality should be the primary concern at every stage of production. Employees must therefore be empowered and take responsibility for the quality of the institution's products. Quality circles might be set up, perhaps with responsibility for implementing improvements identified by the circle members. A quality circle is a group composed of regular employees who meet together to discuss work place improvements and make presentations to management with their ideas. For instance experts within departments can be meeting to discuss improvements that can be made to the delivery of services, especially in terms of lectures carried out to customers i.e. students.

In relation to the information system

The information system in place in the institution needs to be designed in a manner that it will be getting the required information to the right individual at the right time. The right information should help various departments to communicate their needs, desires and problems with each other to ensure consistency and easy flow of information in the institution. Therefore an effective information system is necessary for an institution to sustain the growth in its clientele.

Conclusion

When an institution applies quality management in everything it does this become total quality management. In this article our emphasis has been on how total quality management

can be applied in a number of processes and activities in an institution. We wind up by spelling out the notable benefits of employing total quality management. Implementation of total quality management in an institution's processes and activities will greatly help in the reduction of sub-standard works by the employees and generally inefficiencies. This is due to the fact that TQM places emphasis on promoting quality awareness and participation of all members of the organization in decision making. Elimination of sub-standard works and inefficiencies and improving the efficiency of personnel and facilities embraced by total quality management ultimately leads cost savings and improvements in profitability. When an activity is carried correctly the first time cost such redo costs or cost incurred in correcting the mistake made are reduced.

Finally customers, for instance students in a university are likely to be satisfied with the services provided by the institution when total quality management is employed in the processes and the conduct of tasks in the institution. Therefore is vital to state that total quality management (TQM) is necessary philosophy to employ an institution for it to gain competitive advantage.

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