

The Impact of Total Quality Management (TQM) in Higher Education: A Qualitative Insight of Higher Education in Universities

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Abstract

Total Quality Management has not been successfully implemented in higher educational institutes including universities and colleges, although it is the most debated topic these days. Besides the small impact of Total Quality Management, most of the higher education institutions are taking initiatives to implement such approach but all these efforts for implementing quality management tools are done in the directions of nonacademic activities. Most of the higher education institutes are focusing on various practices such as bill paying, academic registration and purchasing. Since these educational institutes are ignoring the most important factors such as scholarships fee, curriculum and the competency level of teaching staff. As the higher education institutions are not focusing on these factors for implementing TQM, such institutions have abandoned Total Quality Management practices. It has been observed in 1990s that more than half of the educational institutes were failed in implementing TQM because they have ignored such factor that supports the implementation of TQM concept. In addition, TQM has failed to consider the nature of higher education and an academic culture; therefore, for the successful implementation of TQM it is necessary to consider such factors.

Key words: Total Quality Management, universities, implementation, higher education

Introduction

The education in Pakistan is a widely debated issue, especially the availability of quality education in the country. A task force was developed in the country for bringing improvements and applies special measures for improving the quality of higher education. Pakistan Higher Education Commission (HEC) was established in 2002, for the purpose of establishment of knowledge-based economy. HEC has developed

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quality assurance departments in various educational institutes especially the universities. At present, HEC is highly concerned about implementing and monitoring the quality assurance practices in all the higher education institutes (Ahmed, 2012). The concept of Total Quality Management (TQM) includes various perspectives, when implemented in higher education institutes and these perspectives include resources and grants provided to these educational institutions after monitoring their performance (HEC mid- term development. 2005-2010).

As far as the statistics are concerned, from 177 universities recognized by HEC in Pakistan, 103 universities are public sector universities and 74 universities are associated with the private sector (LID, 2015). The alarming sign in the country is that although the numbers of universities are increasing in the country, such as in 2006 there are 118 universities as compared to the 59 universities in 2011, but unfortunately, only three universities are ranked as the best universities among the top 700 universities of the world. The Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) of UK has provided these rankings and it shows that Pakistan is facing major constraints in improving the quality of higher education in the country.

It has been observed by different critics and researchers that TQM possess a greater tendency to develop a numerous amount of papers, making critical decision and conduct necessary meetings (Koch and Fisher, 1998). The excellent rhetoric survey conducted by Zbaracki (1998) states that the major use of TQM is “rhetorical excess” and managers highly encourage “distorted perception of the efficacy of TQM”. Hence, it has been noted that managers implement TQM notion in their organizations by applying its successes, although at times it is difficult to make any achievements. According to Bank (1992,p.47)these managers play a role of “messiahs of quality” and these managers engage themselves in improving commitment to quality, make conversations about quality crusades and bring outlook revolutions. In addition, it has been proposed by researchers that there is a great tendency of surveys and self-interested opinions in such circumstances to improve the quality and to draw conclusions that may increase the Total Quality Management (Bemowski, 1995).

When the higher education industry is concerned, a small number of concrete evidences play an important role in developing and improving Total Quality Management practices and it becomes a matter of great surprise for the managers. The extensive literature for supporting the TQM practices is merely consisted of sampling tools and statistics that have integrated the well-known approaches of TQM such as six sigma approaches and the theories of Deming that are implemented in

various organizations for improving the quality assurance practices and the examples of these large organizations include Motorola and General Electric. Some empirical evidences show that TQM is considered as an approach of life, a philosophy or a culture by its proponents (Herguner and Reeves, 2000).

The successful implementation of TQM practices can be understood and seen by an example of Motorola, which has made great savings of amount 3.2 billion dollars between the years 1987 to 1992 by efficiently utilizing the TQM practices (Micklethwait and Woolridge, 1996), with the help of various literature and by taking evidences from the corporate sector of United States and United Kingdom has proposed that implementing TQM may result in the improved organizational practices and also it can bring significant changes in the organizational outcomes. Moreover, the recent research studies conducted by (Hendricks and Singhai, 1997) have concluded that the organizations that are engaged in implementing TQM practices have greater chances of increased sales growth and these organizations are even able to have strict cost controls that are not even possible without the implementation of TQM. Later, (Easton and Jarrell, 1999) have summarized that these attributes are not associated with the TQM practices and it is not demonstrated that firms are not only able to increase their sales growth and control their cost, but these firms are also able to achieve better outcomes with the implementation of Total Quality Management practices. (Dar- EI, 1997) had come up with an assessment that most of the TQM efforts are a failure and only little or no evidence are available in the favor of TQM, even though there is an extensive research in the favor of TQM and a greater discussion has been done to show that TQM plays a significant role in improving the organizational outcomes. Some opponents of the TQM approach such as (Larson, 1999) have proposed that organizations facing quality issues consider the TQM approach as an “embarrassing failure” and also the different techniques of TQM such as ISO 9000, zero-based budgeting and re-engineering are termed as the flavor of the month, and these approaches have no attraction and benefits while being implemented in the organizations (Van der Wiele and Brown, 2000).

Contemporary evidence from Higher Education

After the evaluation of significance of TQM for higher education, IBM in early 1990s has invested a certain amount of resources for implementing Total Quality Management in the higher education and it had attempted to summarize the importance of this approach at higher education institutes. The most particular and notable reviews were made by American Association for Higher Education (1993, 1994) and also the

research discussed in journal of Total Quality Management (1996). These publications have truly demonstrated the importance of Total Quality Management and its procedures implemented in an organization rather than the evidence to support the importance of such an approach. A very little work is done on the empirical evidence and it has been discussed and revealed in the publications that almost fifty percent of higher education institutes have established quality control cells and councils within five years (Burkhalter, 1996).

Moreover, few of the empirical evidence related to Total Quality Management are associated with nonacademic procedures and processes. These nonacademic procedures include check writing, bill collection, and job scheduling, physical plant inventory and admission applications. Hence, it can be seen that the primary activities of TQM are highly focused on the nonacademic procedures and processes; the example of this evidence is the round table discussion on the implementation of TQM in higher education commission (1994). Furthermore, (Owlia and Aspinwall, 1996) have proposed in the journal “True believers” that the primary focus of Total Quality Management is on the nonacademic activities, and this observation has already proposed by (Barnard, 1999). It has also been said that when the academic issues are considered as a part of TQM, the main focus is on the different variables including consumer and student satisfaction. This observation is considered as true as (Owlia, 1996; Owlia and Aspinwall, 1998; Barnard, 1999; Kanji and Bin Al Tambi, 1999a, b; Kanji et al., 1999); Long et al. have proposed in their studies that a survey conducted in the United Kingdom institutions did not give primary importance to the financial measures in order to measure effectiveness of Total Quality Management practices. The study conducted by Lozier and (Teeter, 1996) observed that during a survey in an undergraduate statistics class, there is a high level of satisfaction among students because of the implemented TQM practices. The researchers have also reported the implementation of TQM approach and practices in various institutions including Georgia Tech, Drexel, Penn State and Samford, where the primary focus of the TQM was on the academic innovations including collaboration between work groups and these innovations are compared to the conventional teaching methods and practices so that the instructional methodologies can be evaluated on the basis of non- TQM methodologies applied in the institutions.

Why TQM is still unsuccessful in Higher Education?

Research Question

It is the most debated topic especially in higher education sector that why the TQM is not much successful in these educational institutes and the possible answer to this question is that TQM is not working properly as it

is being advertised and promoted. As this answer is, actually true that TQM is mostly unsuccessful because of its improper functioning but it raised another question that why it is not working appropriately as it is being promoted and advertised. The other main question generated in this scenario is that why so most of the higher education institutes abandoned TQM practices just after five years of its implementation. Researchers have described three main causes of failure of TQM in higher education institutes. The fundamental reason behind the failure of the TQM practices in higher educational institutes is that they do not focus on the big questions. The availability of limited empirical data on the implementation of TQM practices shows that there is not much focus on the implementation of TQM practices and techniques in the realm of higher educational institutes and most of the colleges and universities are putting more focus on the non-academic perspectives of these institutes while implementing TQM practices (American Association for Higher Education, 1993 and 1994). In addition, it has been noted that various non-academic practices are involved in the TQM implementations and these non-academic practices include admission applications, check writing, physical plant inventory, and job scheduling and bill collection. (Kock and Fisher, 1998) have come to the conclusion that such nonacademic improvements are of great worth for the higher education institutes, as these improvements can help the institutes for making optimal use of their resource, which are of utmost importance for the colleges and universities. Besides considering this evidence as a valid evidence, it has been considered by the higher education institutes that they are facing larger constraints related to what actually should be taught in these institutions and what must be the appropriate curriculum to raise the quality of education. the other great challenges faced by these higher education institutes are related to the induction of latest technology in instructional methodology, the tenure of the faculty, the validity and impact of distance learning, the resource allocation, the attention between graduate and undergraduate education and evaluating the learning level of students. In addition, these challenges for higher education institutions involve the contribution of educational institutions in economic development, drug abuse, diversity of students in the campus, rules for controlling alcohol abuse and the fluctuating fee levels including the tuition fee. The matter of the concern at this present era is that TQM plays a very minor role in addressing these issues of the higher education institutes. Hence, it can be concluded that TQM practices and approach have missed some of these important questions which led to the reduced success of TQM in these higher education institutes. Here, the TQM practices are more concerned about how students get themselves

registered in these institutions rather than what they will learn in these colleges and universities and what will be the role of the faculty members in improving the quality of education.

Thus, the research studies and surveys has revealed that the most important factor behind the failure of TQM in higher education institutes is that it is unable to address the major challenges and constraints faced by colleges and universities. Many of the issues faced by these educational institutions is that how these institutions would be able to create value and how should these institutions expand their services to increase the value for their customers, and also these institutions should be able to fulfill the purpose of their existence and expansion. As it has been noted in different researches that TQM in higher education is unable to answer these critical questions, and also the academic institutions are unable to get an answer of these questions, hence they are unable to implement TQM successfully. It has been proposed and identified that TQM can play an important role in assisting universities and colleges to get an answer of these questions so that they can successfully implement TQM practices. For instance, these institutions can verify and evaluate the importance of distance learning and can make judgment that how effectively these institutions can help students to obtain loan for completing their education. The more enhanced reading and literature on TQM has revealed the fact that TQM is contributing very less in these crucial areas of higher education institutes and also these practices are virtually absent from contributing in these areas. It is the mutual agreement of all the institutions that physical plant is necessary for the efficient operations of an institute and it has been revealed that for the success of an institution the administrative areas and bill paying section should perform efficiently and effectively. And those institutions that are failed to focus on such critical areas, have to face greater loss. But, it his seen that such issues are not bee given relevant importance by the higher education institutions and for this reason, TQM has a greater irrelevance and a very small contribution for the success of these institutions.

Low Reception of Academic Culture to TQM

It has been proposed by researchers that the basic language, ideology and philosophy of TQM is acceptable by all the academic institutes especially the higher education institutes but the transforming culture of universities has made it difficult and impossible for the TQM to be implemented successfully in these higher education institutes. Hence, the modern culture of these institutes is highly resistant to the TQM practices, approach, and creates hurdles and constraints to implement it successfully.

Significance of the Study

One of the most significant and prominent element which is creating difficulties and challenges in the implementation of successful TQM is the academic freedom which has fully transformed the academic culture and this academic freedom can be greatly seen in the lives of the professionals and in the classrooms as well. The professionals are pursuing their disciplines according to the knowledge and research they have conducted under the category of academic freedom and their professional values and their course content is highly based on this research conducted many years ago. Because the faculty members have selected their disciplines and pursued their careers under the academic freedom so they are highly resistant to accept any new techniques and quality control measures. In addition, the performance evaluation procedures are highly rejected by these professionals and TQM approach is not successfully implemented in higher education institutes. Moreover, it is difficult for these institutions to evaluate and measure the teaching methods of these professionals and to create high level of satisfaction for the students and teachers. A commonly observed behavior of teachers during a survey is that they strongly oppose the implementation of TQM practices in their department and they do not appreciate if they are being told to improve their teaching practices especially on the basis of TQM techniques.

The other related aspect of academic institutions is confidentiality and tenure. The purpose of tenure is to provide the secure employment to the faculty members and to protect their academic freedom in order to reduce the threat of the faculty members, so the faculty members see tenure as their job security in the educational institutions. As far as the business organizations are concerned, the managers make it compulsory for all the employees to follow the TQM practices and techniques and those employees who do not follow such practices are highly penalized and also they are being dismissed from their jobs. However, this practice cannot be implemented in higher education institutes when the faculty members are having academic tenure and they have secured employment so they cannot be threatened or forced to follow the TQM practices. Moreover, confidentiality is another string academic tradition for evaluation of performance, salary, tenure and promotion including other activities and it clearly states that administrators in higher education department cannot utilize the situation of faculty members individually. Hence, in this situation the incentives are penalties are highly invisible and they are of less importance for the faculty members. The existence of automatic salary increments in these

institutions defines the tools for behavior modification and these tools are highly applicable and available to academic managers as compared to the other managers.

It has also been concluded that in most of the cases the faculty members prefer to work individually rather than working in groups (Youssef et al., 1998). The concept of teamwork in teaching profession is very rare and it is considered a solitary activity to conduct research in the teaching profession. As compared to the general approach, teamwork and group cohesion is rarely seen in the teaching profession rather than the any other profession especially it is very less common in the higher education institutes. Yet, it is stated that teamwork is one of the significant factor of TQM which is highly ignored in the higher education institutes. On one side, it is true that there are some committees in the academic institutions that highly support teamwork, but on the other hand, these committees are highly process oriented and most of the times they frustrate or delay actions. These academic committees are more an example of an administrative structure and procedures that consisted of protecting the interests of individual faculty members and also there is no evidence of team work and group cohesion in these academic committees, and ultimately these committees reinforce the concept of academic freedom which does not encourage TQM practices in the higher education institutes. It has been noted by (Zbaracki, 1998) that the most important effect of TQM is, if anything is reinforced including meetings, faculty committees and other process-oriented activities, then in such a case the committees are not considered a way to get things done appropriately.

The other major reason, faculty members mostly hesitate in participating in the TQM programs is that TQM approach is perceived as a business related approach and it is considered that such a practice is highly inappropriate for the educational institutes rather it should be implemented in the business organizations. Most of the faculty members repel the idea that they there should be pretest and posttest evaluation of the students or there should be surveys conducted in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the teacher's performance. Hence, researchers have identified that there is a lack of consensus on the existence of universities and colleges. For most of the faculty members, the TQM actions are considered as an antagonistic action because this approach is said to be implemented in the corporate sector for the evaluation of procedures. (Youssef et al, 1998) has proposed in the research that most of the faculty members are accustomed to such evaluations that are being carried out at the end of the semester or during each semester, but TQM is supposed to make continuous evaluations and improvements and that

is the reason it is being strongly opposed or repelled by most of the faculty members, whereas most of the faculty members are threatened by this idea that their performance is evaluated after every lecture, and hence they do not encourage the implementation of TQM practices in the higher education institutes.

All the factors and reasons discussed above are responsible for the failure of implementation of TQM practices in higher education institutes, or in other case, these TQM practices are only used to examine the nonacademic activities being conducted in these higher education institutes. Besides the fact that higher education has created substantial practices for the success of TQM, but it has to face a great opposition from the faculty members and there is a lack of substantial academic ground for the successful implementation of TQM practices and approaches. As there is a distinctive culture in the colleges and universities and there is an intrinsic nature of TQM, so this difference creates a great hurdle in the implementation of successful TQM.

**Failure to identify the challenges of TQM in Higher Education:
What is it?**

The most important benefit of implementing TQM in the Organization is that these organizations get an idea of their current position and to evaluate where they actually want to be. It is difficult to measure quality unless one is aware of the fact that what it is supposed to serve and how it can improve its performance. For successful implementation of TQM, it is necessary that organizations should be aware of their customers such as by focusing on the Ford Motors, it has primarily focused on its customers who are involved in financing and buying various parts. (Youssef et al, 1998) had proposed in the research that it is always hard to define and identify the customers of higher education as they belong to a diverse range of customers. The customers of higher education mostly include alumni, faculty, students, fine arts supporters, business firms, professional sports teams and any organizations who rent facilities as well as farmers and other people. This diversity makes it difficult for the higher education institutes to satisfy the needs and demands of this diverse group of customers. Most of the higher education institutes have complex formation and because of this reason, identifying the target customers is a hard job and for this reasons in most of the case the TQM efforts fallen short in higher education institutes. Same as business organizations, the higher education institutes provide a great benefits and products such as grades in the examination, credit hours, certificates, degrees, performance of students and the ability of students to earn income after completing their education. It has been strongly believed

that colleges and universities provide various products and because of the complex formation, it is getting difficult to implement TQM practices equally in all the campuses. In most of the cases the higher education institutes find it difficult to get agree on what they are actually serving and what they are expected to do so. Several questions raised regarding the customer's identity and the products and service being provided to them and these questions led the universities and colleges to focus on what they are expected to sell and to which target segment and what would be the potential challenges while implementing the TQM practices.

It is easy for the business organizations to find an answer of these questions while implementing TQM, and the example of Ford Motors show that because of the successful implementation of TQM, the company is able to increase its profit margins, increase its return on capital and also to increase return on shareholders' investment. However, no such evidence is available in literature regarding the implementation of TQM in higher education institutes. Also not much investigation is conducted on the issue of existence of college and universities and the concern of faculty members for improving the TQM in the higher education institutes. As there are various disputes in the implementation of TQM in higher education institutes, because of increased diversity and the differentiating culture of colleges and universities in the USA, which has increased the challenges and constraints for TQM to be implemented successfully. Hence, it has been seen and proposed that TQM has a greater tendency to be successfully applied in the higher education institutes rather than focusing on the efficiency of these institutes in handling their emails.

It is commonly believed that disagreements and ambiguities in implementing TQM can be eliminated by focusing on such colleges and universities that are working according to a specified mission. Some of the examples of these institutions include Babson whose focus is on business education and Eastman institute, which is primarily focusing on the music education, but the issue is for those institutes that do not have any primary focus including Southern Utah, California- Berkeley, MIT and many other which are operating without any proper functions and objectives. Therefore, it is on the part of the institutions as they have complex structures it is difficult for them to implement TQM.

Conclusion

The issues related to the implementation of TQM in higher education are that more is done in literature than the actual actions required to implement successfully TQM in the higher education institutes. In

addition, the TQM focused on nonacademic activities and for a reason it does not contribute in the undergraduate curriculum or faculty tenures. It is fading in background and is highly unsuccessful in delivering the quality standards in higher education institutes. As there is a great emphasis on teamwork, meetings and committee work which is up to some extent admirable in the perspective of TQM. Now, the research is conducted for evaluating the reasons for implementing TQM in higher education institutes and to find out empirical evidence for higher education. (Koch and Fisher, 1998) has stated that few years ago, the TQM movement also had a great need of TQM and it was the major area of concern for such TQM movement.

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