Applying Total Quality Management to the Media Organization

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Introduction

The American worker is not unfamiliar with a certain nomenclature made of terms such as brainstorming, feedback, just-in-time, first in-first out, audits, cross-functional training, cycle-time reduction, preventive maintenance, statistical controls, goals, and vision statements. What (s)he may not know is that these are specific concepts and tools born out of a larger model of ongoing, pervasive excellence that values team-based decision making, customer-driven performance, and continuous quality improvement known as Total Quality Management or TQM.

Post-World War II (WWII) Japanese industry stood in ruin, TQM was developed to aid its phoenician rise (Redmond, 1998). Originally successful in manufacturing environments, non-manufacturing, public, and service sectors of the economy have adopted Total Quality Management principles, as well.

A further leap for TQM would be its application to the media organization, where the product requires employment of a number of creative, independent minds, and where there exists at least one unique, external customer, the audience.

Origins of TQM

Everyone is a customer, either internal or external in TQM; it is not a transient management fad, but a permeating, enculturating operations philosophy. All persons share in facilitation. All are shepherds. All are stakeholders. TQM is the business kin to Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) in that it fully integrates all disciplines within an organization, exploiting the best of each component. Any invested party is a stakeholder, customer, or audience. All differently disciplined folk are given seats at the table so that a unified
goal (TQM) or message (IMC) is effected (Harris, 1998). Quality is not a separate, altruistic goal, but an organization-wide orientation towards excellence at every level, an ethic that fosters business success.

TQM is management and control activities based on the leadership of top management and based on the involvement of all employees and all departments from planning and development to sales and service. These management and control activities focus on quality assurance by which those qualities, which satisfy the customer, are built into products and services during the above processes and then offered to consumers. --Japanese Society for Quality Control

Modern quality control started in the 1920s with Walter Shewhart; his Economic Control of Quality of Manufactured Product points to subjective quality as the "goodness of a thing" (Kondo, 2000). In the 1950s W. Edwards Deming and Joseph M. Juran lectured industrie japonais on the subject of quality. They are often credited with Japanese ascent to international quality leadership. Juran counters, saying that he and Deming provided the jump-start those companies needed, and Asian CEOs were keen listeners and implementers.

Japan has a centuries old tradition of producing quality craft products. After WWII, the country faced translating this quality into produced goods. Before 1945, the essence of Nipponese quality was embodied in its war machine; business executives were in charge of quality management and goal setting. Juran believes CEOs must take the lead in the corporate push for quality (Juran, 1993).

Juran authored the Quality Control Handbook, affirming that our modern dependence on technology and the interdependence of service and production makes quality a very important issue (Stewart, 1999).

Deming defined quality as "a product that is useful and good enough for the purpose intended", while Juran defined quality as "meeting the needs of customers." Quality is key to
modern competitiveness, market growth, and profitability (Kondo, 2000). The Japanese took Deming seriously, with their sense of responsibility to both superiors and subordinates Mazur, 2000).

“All TQM philosophies state that businesses, first and foremost, must be customer-driven,” (Salkin, 1992). Customers are allies in an organizational quest for quality. Teams power TQM, and are made of management, shop-floor personnel, and all those in between, empowered as a group to stomp out nonproductive practices.

Quality in the West

Western quality emissaries brought the TQM ethic to the Eastern isles, but change came slower to American firms. The Second World War had boosted US industry; it was a military victor, if not savior, and was not likely to espouse an ”Eastern” management philosophy. Some Western companies did embrace the “Team” concept early, which empowered workers or groups of workers, while others maintained a strict centrally controlled management style. The two extremes—early adopters and rigid conservatives--appear to be coalescing to some extent; however, there remain certain vocational, regulatory, and legal decisions that must be left to management.

Creech (1995) emphasizes the Five Pillars of TQM: Product, Process, Organization, Leadership, and Commitment. He stresses that all five pillars must be in alignment in order to reap benefits. Organizations need to understand. ”The service sector has the most to gain from TQM because of its strong need to satisfy customers,” (Warren, 1996). “Managers will find the use of teams to be a beneficial means of achieving quality control,”(LePree, 1995).
Employee empowerment can enhance competitiveness; they can work in teams. Teams can progress to self-direction where members are expected to acquire multiple skills and to perform managerial tasks. Team development includes team design, choosing team players, training, facilitating leadership transitions, and establishing performance awards (Wellins, 1992).

According to Bowman (1994), performance appraisals focused on assessing and changing individual behavior are misguided—Deming’s “management-by-fear”—destroying, morale, inhibiting motivation, discouraging innovation, and supporting the status quo. No evolution occurs. By contrast, TQM promotes teamwork, coaching, listening, and leading (Bowman, 1994).

Recently TQM has become sort of a social movement in the US (Hackman, 1995), generating new ideas and keeping track of what works (Levine, 1995). Doubts persist, however. Some say assumptions and theories underlying TQM are incompatible with the economic model that undergirds western management practices, while innovations are usually developed in the United States and delivered top-down by leading companies. TQM differs in that its primary objective is customer satisfaction (Western management versus TQM, 1995).

TQM does not easily blend with certain dynamic realities: restructuring, downsizing, and reengineering (Straining of quality, The, 1995). Progress toward total quality in the west may be slow and uneven, but Kano (1993) finds reason for optimism (Kano, 1993). TQM appears to reduce costs in the end (Straining of quality, The, 1995).

The Media Organization

Finessing TQM into the specific area of media management requires skills of both counselor and bureaucrat. Taking the pulse of human interaction within a media organization
Applying TQM to the Media Organization

involves the unique challenge of managing the oft autonomous, artful worker. The removal of management from daily operations can foster golden children or stars. Trenchwork by management can mitigate these developments.

Do all media organizations subscribe to a management system? Lusting after profits is not management, but rather an example of high-level, single-issue decision-making. True managers—those supervisors who nurture quality—realize there are human persons involved in all processes. A decision made anywhere in the system potentially affects all others.

Recognizing subordinates as stakeholders allows for the injection of a new idea, the planting of a seed of creativity, or a mutational change potentially cultivating traits within an organization, which can aid in its survival within the competitive field of media. Encouraging technical writing skills, an incredulous nature, professional training, and a business acumen builds a better journalists.

The market currently defines the media menu. Dollars are key to content. Competition is key to capitalism. If there is no competition, then the market dollars do not work fairly to determine content. Government is charged with balancing these forces. It is important to promote corporate responsibility while avoiding censorship.

Traditionally TQM has applied to production or operations-based industries not to those who craft the creative word. Organized media provide services, such as broadcasting, or a tangible product, such as a newspaper or magazine.

The model shows that managers consume rhetoric of success about TQM, use that rhetoric to develop their TQM program, and then filter their experiences to present their own rhetoric of success. Consequently, the discourse on TQM develops an overly optimistic view of
TQM. The models demonstrate how individual actions and discourse shape TQM and fuel institutional forces (Zbaracki, 1998).

Implementation of total quality management (TQM) or continuous improvement (CI) in U.S. industry has not met with original expectations. The literature suggests a primary reason for this failure is lack of top management support (Krumwiede, 1998).

Many programs fail because of preoccupation with technical issues and pay too little attention to the human factor. Recognizing that it is necessary to identify the behavioral skills needed to achieve and sustain successful change (Wellins, 1995).

It is also revealed that the manner in which employees perceive the beneficial effects of TQM is of greater importance in predicting subsequent participation in TQM than is their initial participation. It is found that there is no relationship between employee organizational commitment and employee participation in TQM (Coyle-Shapiro, 1999).

Since their fiduciary duty to their clients usually translates into seeking the highest possible rate of return, these multibillion-dollar institutions -- public and private pension funds, insurance companies, banks, foundations, and endowments – focus on increases in company earnings and, thus, higher stock prices. In the case of newspaper companies, this may mean that no matter how committed the companies are to quality journalism, they face enormous pressure to cut costs, which often means cutting staff and news hole.

Recently, with changes in certain federal regulations, the institutions have increasingly thrown their weight around. They have a lot of weight to throw. For example, Gannett's board of directors and executive officers might run the $9-billion company, but they do not own it; together, they own only 1.3 percent of Gannett's stock. The University of California, the company's largest institutional investor, owns three times that much. Over all, institutions own
72 percent of Gannett stock. Gannett is hardly alone. Institutions own about the same percentage of Knight-Ridder and more than half the publicly traded shares of Media General, The New York Times Company, A.H. Belo, The Washington Post Company, and the Tribune Company (see table). Even companies like the Times that are controlled by family rusts, and thus immune from hostile takeovers as long as the family members remain united, rely on the market for capital to finance acquisitions, growth, and development. No company that raises money by selling stock can be entirely free from stockholder pressure. (Newhouse is privately held, so while it may have to please some bankers, it has no public investors to contend with.) (Soloski, 1996)

### Team Journalism

Around the mid 1990s, some journalists were dealing with "grid system," designed to numerically measure reporters' work: assembly-line journalism. There are also more traditional systems assessment systems that avoid statistical calculation—instead offering a supervisory critique in narrative form. But many other newsrooms still quantitate performance issuing report cards.

Media defend such codified evaluations systems as necessary for reduce inefficiency, manage cost, and encourage performance along with professional growth. But many reporters find this inappropriate for a creative professional activity. felt insulted by the company's terminology in characterizing their work. She blames the low ratings on the company's attempt to save money.

Journalists have come to make many adjustments to a corporate management structure increasingly focused on profits, management efficiencies, and higher productivity. But newsroom managers who believe they can treat professionals as just an extension of the corporate spreadsheet may find themselves facing an alienated workforce. Having their work
reduced to scores or grades or statistical measurements can be "traumatic" for journalists If you overlay some factory model onto the newsroom, you begin to detract from the thing that makes for a good newsroom -- creative freedom. You can put a quantified system into any newsroom, but good journalists won't work there." (Underwood, 1998).

Communications is key → comm professionals News librarians, analysts, IT, Contractors, freelancers. uses and gratifications: cognitive needs, affective needs, (emotional), personal, social, and institutional needs (strengthening), tension release, personal identity, personal relationship, active audience, time spent viewing, reading, listening, surveillance, information, communication tool, entertainment, diversion, amusement.

news editors, news researchers, or data-processing staffers (also known as information systems people).2 The advent of increasingly sophisticated computerized information search, retrieval and analysis programs changed journalists' investigative methods. The "lone-wolf" investigative journalist has given way to a newer concept of "team journalism."3 This conceptual approach is one in which the talents of news researchers, editors, systems specialists and statistical analysts combine with journalists and high technology to become a powerful force for truth and justice (Semonche, 1993).

Evolutionary management system still offers promise in new millennium Total Quality Management has been a source of constant discussion among American management for more than a decade. By all indications, TQM will continue to evolve (Youngless, 2000).

Natural selection, the process that results in the adaptation of an organism to its environment by means of selectively reproducing changes in its constitution though mutation, a spontaneous change. (Darwin, 1993).
Social darwinism proposes the same process occurs in a suprabiological manner—in society, organizations, and newsrooms. To foster the mutations or creative ideas, TQM should come down a notch once it enters the creative venue of modern journalism. A more appropriate model for this milieu is that of Integrated Communication. All functionalities should work to produce a unified message, yet retain their separate skill sets and work ethics. Cross-training is possible, but full integration may not be practical. Specialization can be beneficial coupled with a mutual respect for all contributors and stakeholders. Stakeholders include internal publics, as well as the external audience, be they subscribers, listeners, or viewers.

The unique media customer is that audience. Creativity, fiscal health, performance issues, and responsible and effective communication are all braided together. To tease them apart would weaken their synergistic tensile strength. The onus falls on the media manager to be the conduit from corporate TQM to scoop IMC. Supervisors play a crucial role in communicating to the rank and file a company's TQM goals and the means to achieve these objectives. The effectiveness of TQM strategies in any company will therefore depend on the level and quality of its supervisor's participation (Golhar, 1997).

Included in the situation analysis is "Identifying SWOTs," as Harris refers to discovering/researching the client's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. (Harris, 1998).

Conclusion

"The 20th century began with scientific management and it will end with total quality management, different sides of the same coin," (Ciulla, 1997) TQM achieves productivity and quality by digging into the very hearts and souls of workers. Although TQM enriches the quality of work life for people, it is difficult for companies to live up to its espoused values of
commitment, trust, loyalty and teamwork. These are reciprocal moral values that you cannot get from people without giving something back. (Ciulla, 1997)

Companies once gung-ho about quality have become disillusioned and discouraged and have dropped out. Moore, 1995).

Total Quality Management is fully appropriate for manufacturing environments, especially those with a traditionally Eastern sense of community. As TQM moves west, its “all for one” mantra weakens. Insert its principles into a nonmanufacturing setting, and more concessions must be made. Imposing TQM principles on a media organization requires further compromise. The application pure total quality management to the working journalist seems doomed to fail without incorporation of integrated communications ideals, allowing the creative worker to flourish within an otherwise deontological workplace. As one moves from the well regulated production setting toward the art of composition and story-telling, a finer fraction of this useful management device must be distilled, always retaining quality while adapting for survival.
References


Applying TQM to the Media Organization


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http://www.apa.org/journals/webref.html