TQM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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*I*F one leaves aside the philosophical aspect of life, one can safely say that the purpose of life is constantly to improve the quality of one's life. Quality has been a virtue which has remained important during all the ages of human history, be it the quality of a product, the quality of the time spent on any job, the quality of education/training received or the quality of management. The lives of human beings are, to a large extent, affected by the quality of anything and everything around. Quality failures can and do result in serious human inconveniences, economic waste and even loss of life. A big change, however, in the attitude of mankind towards quality has recently taken place. Quality, in the more liberalised and competitive world of today, is no longer an option for which something has to be paid extra, it is a positive requirement for the very survival of all systems. Quality is and rightly so on the top of the agenda in all progressive organisations.

TQM Concept

Quality is easy to visualise and yet difficult to define. Quality is used both in absolute and in relative terms. Quality may be defined as something which passes a standard or something which is consistently good with no defects. Quality may also be defined with reference to a purpose, i.e., something which fulfills the purpose for which it exists. Some define quality as equitable value for money. Quality may be defined as excellence with reference to both the price and the cost. Quality is neither mind nor matter, but a third entity independent of the two. It is 'best' with reference to the requirements of the purpose in mind. Therefore, the quality function includes all activities, no matter where performed or by whom performed, through which we achieve quality.

Quality of education is a multi-dimensional concept, with varying conceptualizations. It includes, within its ambit, the quality of inputs in the form of students, faculty, support staff and the infrastructure: the quality of processes in the form of learning and teaching activity: and the quality of outputs in the form of the enlightened students who move out of the system (Sahney, Karunes and Banwet, 2001). Quality control is an effective system of ensuring quality, ensuring continuing excellence. Total Quality Management (TQM) is a modern term wider in scope than the total quality control (TQC). TQC considers the role of employees in improving the productivity. But it remains silent about the quality of work life, employee satisfaction and organisational development. TQM, however, is a holistic view and takes into its fold not only ensuring productivity and efficiency but also ensuring individual satisfaction and institutional building and human well being. TQM is not merely preventive, it is pro-active.

This new approach to quality control, which has come to be known as TQM, is not merely applicable to commercial organisations, it is equally relevant for classroom learning and, more so, for management of educational institutions. TQM is a philosophy and a methodology which assists institutions and which introduces and manages change- a change of cultures: change of attitudes and working methods. Custodians of education must, therefore, realise that any educational institution is a system comprising many subsystems which interact with each other and with the total system as well, one affecting the other and in turn getting affected by the other. Thus, the systems must work collaboratively together to develop an effective and efficient total system. This will, in turn, ensure the effective and efficient goal fulfillment.

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TQM Philosophy

TQM approach keeps the organisational goals at the supreme but there is a fundamental shift in philosophy - from work centered to employee-centered. TQM believes in the following:

1. There are no workers and no managers, all employees of an educational institution have important roles to play. The role of each one is important. Therefore, we must realise that all are facilitators and team members, the head of them being the leader of the team. The team can never succeed unless everyone puts into his/her best.

2. Involvement, and not merely participation in management, is the key word. Involvement means participation plus commitment and pride. This requires both empowerment of the employees and control also and when their actions go beyond addressing the institutional needs and objectives.

3. Everyone is made to identify oneself with the institution. Employees voluntarily come forward as the relationships should be family-oriented, where everyone gives his/her best even without asking. The relationships should be informal, even though the formal authority remains intact beyond doubt.

4. TQM requires a new set of values. There should be openness, transparency, trust, patience, respect and discipline. There is a need for long-term thinking and emphasis on long-term objective. Short cut, short term gains and short sightedness should be avoided. The system of punishments and rewards is to remain open to every body's evaluation. Thus, TQM is both practical and ethical

TQM Process

In an educational institution, the TQM process brings with it the commitment to quality, commitment to the employees, and commitment to the organisation. Principals, administrators and teachers, as parts of the educational partnership, really want good things to happen for students. All those who contribute to the system should be involved, with a clear understanding of the purpose – the employees and the students, the environment and the strategic planning, that go to make it a success. It is an approach to improve the effectiveness and flexibility of the organisation as a whole. The improved performance is directed towards satisfying cross functional goals as quality, cost, manpower development, quality of work life, etc. These activities ultimately lead to increased students and employee satisfaction. The process to introduce TQM in colleges should generally have the following steps:

1. **Mission and Passion :** Total quality is an idea which has to be communicated. The determination and announcement of mission statement is the first and foremost task on which the whole TQM will depend. It helps everyone to focus on the central theme. It gives directions to the institution. There is no or minimal conflict. Everyone shares a passion to move continuously close to the ideal vision. The students, the teachers, the employees and the administrators push the college in one direction. Action of each one of them will be directed and moved by a common philosophy.

2. **Administrator as a Role Model :** Have you completely identified yourself with your institution and are you always thinking of making it a better and better college every day and fighting with all your strength all the vested interests which want to come in the way of your realizing the vision of an ideal college. It must also be clear from the side of administrator/principal of the institution that he / she is committed to total quality. The commitment should be communicated in meetings with employees and students and must be practiced i.e. it must be by word of mouth and by action visibly demonstrated. The process of pursuing this agenda should be continuous and never lost sight of.

3. **Environment factors :** The next step is identification of the factors of internal and external environment, which have a bearing on the institution building. These include factors effecting the work environment in the institution (proper cleanliness, lighting, teaching aids, projectors, computer labs, lab materials, canteen, sports, gardening, water, etc) and factors helpful in image building of the institution (industry-institution interaction, debates, conferences, seminars, public relation including media management etc.) In managing total quality, endeavor should be to involve both internal and external environment factors. Involve students to help create environment for better learning/activity process. Involve outsiders for mutual benefit. In conclusion, there is a need to develop self-motivation for TQM in everybody who matters. Liberalisation

and globalisation have set new trends in domestic and global competitive environment. This has led to a great disparity between what is taught and what is needed at the work place. Due to the socio-economic, cultural and technological transformation which has taken place during past decade, newer demands are being placed upon educational institutions. Educational system can effectively react to these internal and external challenges only when it emphasizes on total quality. Engage in the delicate balancing act of ensuring quality to external customer (students, parents, taxpayers), while at the same time paying attention to the needs of internal customers (teachers, board members, and other co-workers).

4. **Accountability :** We have to develop the system in which every group (student, teachers, researcher, manager) is accountable to all other groups and members of each group are accountable to one another. Accountability is defined in terms of explicitly stated objective criteria, in which students are accountable to teachers because they have to submit regular assignments and they are subject to regular and continuous open internal assessment and accountable to taxpayer who wants them to receive their education by hard work. We should develop a system in which teachers are accountable to students through instruction surveys and are accountable to management through self assessment and assessment of teacher by outside organizations and in which researchers are prepared to be assessed by outside agencies and funding agencies for their work. We have to develop a system in which managements are accountable for their work through assessment by accreditation process. Moreover all accountability at all levels has to be in terms of criteria laid down sufficiently in advance.

5. **Human Relations :** There is a need to enthuse quality in the whole setup, including the relationship. All individuals, small or big must be viewed as important human beings with physiological, psychological, social and ego needs. Establish systematic and continued communication among everyone. Develop skills in conflict resolution, problem solving and negotiations while displaying greater tolerance for and appreciation of conflict. The informal relations must be tuned to help the formal organization.

6. **Feedback :** TQM is a continuous process. There is a need for continuous performance appraisal of all the subsystems as well as the system as a whole. The quality standards may be fixed in advance and performance compared both in qualitative and quantitative terms. The standards may also be reviewed as the graph of performance rises. For this purpose, an independent assessment machinery should be created in the form of a Quality Co-odinator or TQM committee. The machinery should be such as may have high moral credentials and faith of everyone, completely independent of the management/administration.

Conclusion

Quality education is all about systems that lead to good academic culture, excellent academic result, progressive and adaptive management, clear and transparent administration, prominent profile of outgoing students, and, above all, review and modification of inputs. All stakeholders have a prominent role to play. TQM in educational institutions is the need of the hour. It must be tried in colleges/Universities for maximum performance of the students and the employees. It must also be implemented for institutional image-building. It has become all the more necessary with the entry of the private sector in education in a big way. TQM will help achieve excellence, which only can guarantee the survival of institutions in a highly competitive world, with ever-decreasing subsidy in the education sector.

References

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