A review on an employee empowerment in TQM practice

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Industrial management and organisation

ABSTRACT

Purpose: This paper discusses the issues of employee's empowerment, their training needs, suggestions and other issues related to it. Total quality management (TQM) is a management technique adopted by the most manufacturing organizations. TQM in general is viewed as organization set up which will help to manufacture products at lowest cost by the following various management techniques through continuous improvement. Employee empowerment is providing decision making powers to a team or an individual.

Design/methodology/approach: Employee empowerment is providing decision making powers for a team or individual.

Findings: Employee empowerment is good for an organization and employee is empowered to make specific decision for the interest of the organization. Empowerment helps to play a wider role in an organization as a process owner.

Research limitations/implications: This is a conceptual study, and hence, there is no hypothesis tested as an empirical study. It does provide a good foundation for future research.

Originality/value: The paper is a conceptual design and more elaborative requirements can be done. This is an input to create awareness among the organizations.

Keywords: Quality Management; Employee empowerment; training needs; Brain storming

1. Introduction

TQM is a journey and it never ends. A change is the only permanent. TQM is a philosophy and strategy minded customer. The word total implies that all members of the organization make consistent efforts to achieve the objective for a customer through systematic efforts for the improvements. All employees must participate in the development of shared vision, mission, plans and in quests for continuous improvement [1]. Such participation will require specific efforts towards the acquisition of knowledge and skills facing day to day problems and making fast but low-risk decisions. TQM is not an approach to get things done at any

cost attitude. It is a systematic approach to quality, process improvement to delight the customers. The success of TQM is not easy from the organizational point of view. It is not possible to get full support from every member of organization. Certain members of the organization will be suspicious over management that may lead to higher requirements of output and decrease the manpower requirements. TQM implementation is only in the range of 25 to 30 per cent of those who have initiated the practice [1]. Even in Japan, when TQM was first initiated, there was a lot of opposition by the work force or front liner. Here, the work force is referred as front liners. They are like armed soldiers at the war front. So they are called as front liners. TQM was not successful in

certain organization due to sustainability of leadership and purpose, communications, team work for quality improvement and lack of total commitment to the TQM philosophy and practices. Success is the hall mark of the practicing TQM. TQM is a philosophy which emphasizes continuous improvement as a process that places premium on achievement of customer satisfaction. This requires participation of everyone in the organization in the development of shared mission, vision, plans and in the quest for continuous improvements. A lot of problems and standard situations are solved in an adhoc manner. The existing management systems are without necessary transparency and formalization [2]. An increasing numbers of companies are using teams to leverage the knowledge and experience of their employees in order to improve quality, reduce costs and satisfy the customer [3]. Each organization having a quality management system implemented and also plans and objectives recorded in the improving strategy of organizations should have intellectual capital resources which permit creating of quality processes and the same finished product [4]. Quality management is the way firms are managed, which makes obtaining the efficiency success, effectively success and competitiveness superiority possible assuming the long term success, meeting customers and workers needs and financial results [5].

2. TQM evolution

TQM is customer minded management philosophy and strategy. TQM has become part of the corporate management parlance on a global scale. While it was earlier regarded as buzz word, hype and fad, it is now considered as a must for survival and success [6].

TQM is a way of managing to improve the effectiveness, flexibility and competitiveness of business as a whole. A message for serving customers with goodwill and respect was taught long ago by Mahatma Gandhi of India. According to him: a customer is the most important visitor on our premises. He is not dependent on us, we are dependent on him. He is not an interruption on our work; he is the purpose of it. He is not an outsider on our business, he is a part of it. We are not doing him a favour by serving him. He is doing us a favour by giving an opportunity to do so [7-8]. Figure 1 shows a basic model for TQM.
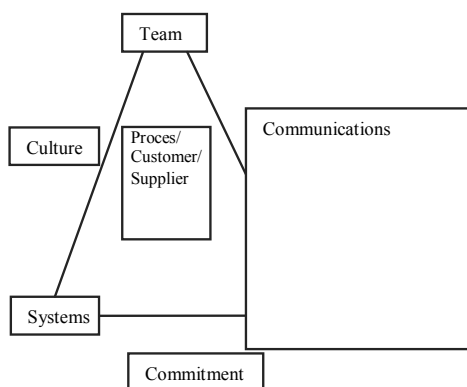

Fig. 1. TQM model

Top management leadership, employee's empowerment are considered as two of the most important principles of TQM because of their assumed relationship with customer satisfaction. TQM is to determine the relationship between top management leadership, employees' empowerment, job satisfaction and customer satisfaction [9].

3. TQM basic principles

TQM principles are the main factors to guarantee the implementation of TQM. TQM principles can be broadly classified into ten major headings. They go as follows:
- Leadership,
- Commitment,
- Total involvement - by employees' empowerment and management,
- Continuous improvement,
- Total customer satisfaction,
- Training and education,
- Ownership,
- Reward and recognition,
- Prevention of error,
- Co-operation and team work.

All the above principles have to be implemented fully to ensure the success of TQM.

3.1. Employees' empowerment

Innovation can thrive when collaboration takes place and collaboration can occur best when teams are empowered [10].Empowerment is a concept that links individual strengths and competencies, natural helping systems and proactive behaviour to social policy and social change. In the other words, empowerment links individual and his or her well being to wider social and political environment in which he or she functions [11]. Successful implementation of total quality management depends heavily on changes in employee attitude and activities. But what its impact on these changes on the employee, especially on employee turnover intentions? Studies revealed from one company field test using 113 employees before TQM and a subset of 73 employees after TQM implementation. Results indicated significant improvements in a role of: ambiguity, job satisfaction, job involvement, organizational commitment, and employee turnover intentions, but no significant changes in role conflict, task characteristics, and career satisfaction. TQM managers are expected to gain employee's trust, encourage employees' problems solving, and promote co-operation among departments. In fact, many of the basic elements of TQM deal with people: team work participate management, creativity, innovation, reward structure, extensive training, high level communications, reduction of fear of losing security, obsession with improvement, management commitment at all levels, customer feedback, employee's involvement and empowerment, for improved communications through flatter organizations and quicker decision making. Empowerment does not mean that the management has no role to play or no responsibility. In fact, the

management has more responsibilities. They have to monitor the skills continuously required for carrying out the ever-changing complexity of jobs of the teams. The management must be willing to help the teams when they are unable to solve issues. The responsibilities of the management are to control the processes and not the individual team members. It was proved that productivity increased by empowerment by 30 percent.

The employees should be encouraged to their own responsibility and top management should help them to achieve it. The top management should take responsibilities on the following:

- Management should listen to attitude. Good listener makes the difference.
- Accept the recommendation given by a team and believe that it is good for the organizational growth.
- Invest time and money as requested by teams.
- Prepared to wait for the success of the teams and do not pressure them to achieve results immediately.
- Spend more time at the initial stages and listen to the problems of the team. During execution there may be some problems and should be heard instead of finding fault.
- Reward the good teams and this motivate further.
- Provide information technology based communication systems.

The definition given by Xerox Corporation Management Institute is reproduced below as definition for the empowerment. Empowerment is, an organizational state, where people are obliged to direct business and understand their performance boundaries, thus it enables them to take responsibility and ownership while seeking improvements, identifying the best course of action and imitative steps to meet customer requirements [12]. The empowered team should conduct themselves in a responsible manner, i.e... They should know their performance boundaries; or in the other words, employees have to conduct themselves within delegated authority and responsibility. They have to align with management philosophy approach to customer satisfaction and organization's vision and mission. They cannot have their own way of doing things since management has to achieve cohesion in the organization and will have more information about the business than even the smartest employee and hence well equipped to formulate the policies and overall directions. One of the criteria on European Foundation for Quality management (EFQM) model is people's development and innovation in maximizing the contribution of employees through their development and involvement [13]. Figure 2 shows EFQM model and its parameters with percentage of points.

3.2. Empowerment is not without bounds

Empowerment of employees is without bounds or limitations. It should be structured and planned to achieve the goal in the TQM way. The employees should be aligned with business direction as brought out in the vision and mission statements by the CEO. They have to understand their performance boundaries and expected performance / results. An employee owns his processes; it means employees themselves improve the quality of their processes, while the management is watching and is ready to help them when needed. Therefore, empowering means that they

should do what they are authorised to do and with management approval before making changes.
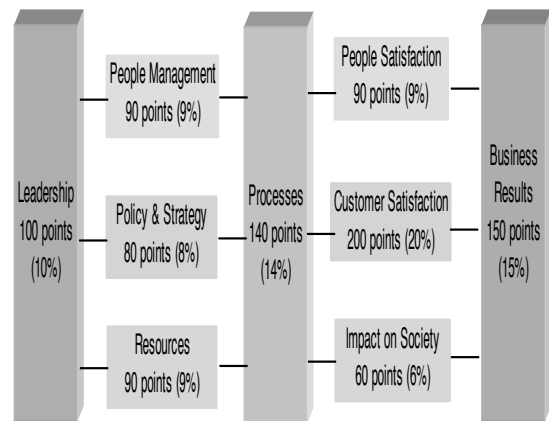

Fig. 2. EFQM model [11]

3.3. Empower teams and not individuals

A team of employees should be empowered and not the individuals. Even when an individual is empowered it is done as in his capacity as coordinator of the team. The team has to achieve the objectives set forth by the management. The team has to identify the best course of action in every context. The team has to take decisions on its own within prescribed boundaries. It also has to carry out mid –course corrections wherever required. The team should function in a democratic way to achieve success. The team members should try to solve their problems within organizational frame work. The management will not take part in day to day activities; it should watch what is happening. The management should have a mechanism for obtaining a feedback of the results. It is not detachment of the teams from the management, but it is the process of equipping the teams and motivating and encouraging them to carry out the assigned tasks, as per the requirements.
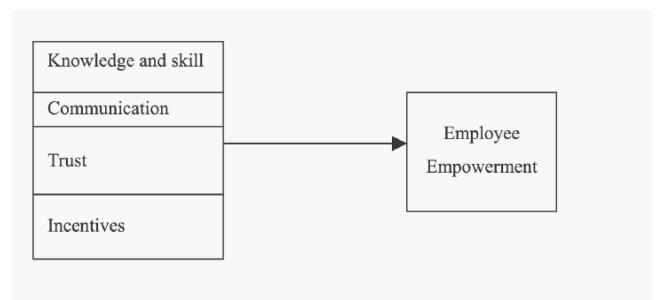

Fig. 3. Empowerment model [14]

Fig. 3 includes three constructs proposed by Bowen and Lawler [14] as antecedents of empowerment adding the trust construct. Trust is a widely researched and recognized construct in terms of its impact between customers, staff and management.

The four knowledge, communication, trust and incentives are predicted to have an influence on the empowerment, particularly customer - contact employees.

3.4. Training needs for empowerment

One of the fundamental requirements before embarking on forming self managing teams is training of all the employees in the team so that they are prepared for the empowerment. They should have wiliness to change. They should be able to manage a change. The team members should learn good qualities and they establish sound relationship with the other team members. This is more important for any teams. For the interest of the organization, all teams members should work single minded to discharge their duties. The training of teams should be done in such way that all the members should understand their responsibilities, adjust them with the other members, motivate the others and they should have a motivational attitude.

3.5. Empowerment in a crisis

When a product design is changed for improvement, this may be good for some customers but it may not satisfy all. When there was a complaint and need to be addressed by the service personal immediately in the interest of the organization and for future business. The person deputed to attend the complaint should be given empowerment to take spot decision wisely and rectify the same instead of referring it back to organization. In this case, an employee was given empowerment to make it quickly on the spot and rectify the same instead of referring it back to organization. The decision may take back the product for servicing at service centre or changing the parts for free of charge at the place of functioning or free replacement for the entire products. These types of decision should be at the interest to satisfy a customer or future business. The taken action should be for the interest of the organization, not for the individual. The decision taken by an individual was a decision taken by the organization. This empowerment will bring happiness to the customers.

3.6. Considering employee's point of view

Employee risk, taking an initiative, requires a certain environment and a certain set of conditions. As an employee is willing to learn new thinking and doing skills if the following conditions exist [15]:
- an employee can see that he will be better off by learning,
- available to him.
  Employees' expectation from top managers:
- believe in their ability to be successful,
- be patient and give them time to learn,
- provide direction and structure,
- teach them new skills in a way and in incremental steps,
- share information with them sometimes to build report,
- give them timely, understandable feedback and encourage them throughout learning process,
- offer alternative ways to perform tasks,
- exhibit sense of humour and demonstrate care for them,
- focus on results and acknowledge personal improvement.

3.7. Brain storming

Brainstorming with the other employees serves as catalysts in drawing out group members. Participants are encouraged to share any idea that comes to their mind. All ideas are considered valid. Participants are not allowed to make judgement or to evaluate suggestions. All ideas and suggestions are recorded, preferably on a marker board, flip chart, or another medium that allows group members to review them continuously. After ideas have been recorded, the evaluation process begins. The team members are asked to go through the list one at a time, weighing the relative merits of each. This process is repeated until the group narrows the choice to a specified number. Brain storming can be an effective vehicle for collecting employee's input and feedback, particularly if managers understand the weakness associated with it and how they try to overcome it. Managers being interested in soliciting the employee's input through brainstorming should be familiar with the concepts of group thinking and group shifting. These two concepts can undermine the effectiveness of brainstorming and the other group techniques. Group thinking is the phenomenon that exists when people being in a group focus more on reaching a decision than on making a good decision. A number of factors can be contributed to a group thinking, including the following:
- overly prescriptive group leadership,
- peer pressure for conformity, group isolation,
- unskilled application of group decision-making techniques.
The following recommendations may be taken into consideration for overcoming group thinking.
- Encourage criticism,
- Encourage to develop several alternatives. Do not allow the groups to rush through hasty decisions,
- Assign a member or members to play a role of devil's advocate,
- Include people who are familiar with the issues,
- Hold last chance meeting. When a decision is reached, arrange a follow up meeting a few days later. After group members have had time to think things over, they may have second thoughts. Last chance meetings give the employees an opportunity to voice their second thoughts.
Group shifting is a phenomenon that exists when group members exaggerate their initial position hoping that the eventual decision will be what they really want to. If groups members get together prior to meeting and decide to take an overly risky or overly conservative view, then it may be difficult to overcome.

3.8. Improving suggestion schemes

The suggestion systems are the collection of process used to solicit, collect, evaluate and adopt or turn down suggestions. Good suggestion systems should have the following:
- all suggestions should receive a formal response,
- all suggestions are responded immediately,
- performance of each department in generating and responding to suggestions is monitored by managements,
- system costs and savings are reported,
- recognitions and rewards are handled promptly,

- good ideas are implemented,
- personality conflicts are minimized.

Many companies which like to practice the TQM concepts are beginning to accept employees' input as not only desirable but necessary to compete. From the above criteria, it can be seen that operating a suggestion system involves more than having employee's tools into a box, accepting some, throwing the rest away. An approach that is being used increasingly is the computer aided suggestion system. Once the suggestion is logged into the system, an acknowledgement may be provided on line. Even, the suggestion may be awarded with small gift items so that each and every employee is proud of his or her response.

3.9. Improving individual suggestions

To make good suggestions, employees need to know how to do two things.
- identify problems and formulate ideas for improvement,
- clearly and concisely communicate their ideas in a written form.

The following three steps to formulate ideas for work place improvements can increase a number of ideas they generate and the quality of those ideas.
- Problem identification involves identifying situations that differ from the desired result. At this point, no attempt is made to determine the cause of the problem, nor should a cause be too quickly assumed. Employees should be helped to learn to approach problems systematically and in a step by step manner. The task is to record problem situations that are candidates for improvement.
- Research into why it is important because, if done properly, it can prevent the expenditure of resources treating symptom rather than causes.
- Idea development improves the development of ideas for solving the problem identified in the first step by eliminating the cause identified in the second step. When ideas for improvement have been formulated, employees should write them down using graphics appropriately to illustrate their ideas.

Top managers and management can help employees to improve their individual suggestions by coaching them to do the following.
- Clearly explain the current situation that creates the problem.
- Get to the heart of the proposed change with no preliminaries or rationalizations, and be specific.
- prepare illustrations to clarify the proposed change, in every case where this is appropriate.

Evaluations and rating suggestions [16]

Employees are often in the best position to make suggestions for work place improvements, but in the final analysis it is still the manager who must decide, whether the proposal idea is feasible. It is like a loan officer in a bank trying to decide which loan applicants will pay off and which will be deadbeats. The following may be taken into considerations while evaluating suggestions:
- Not all suggestions can be evaluated fairly while sitting at your desk. Questions about a suggestion should be resolved by going to the source and discussing them with the suggested. Be patient and find out what the suggester is trying

to say. If necessary, help the suggester to improve his or her suggestion,
- A suggestion that looks bad or outdated on the surface may still contain and discount the whole suggestion if part of it is bad.
- Be generous for the first time with suggesters to build up their confidence. If possible, try to accept the suggestion, or at least part of it, making revision to the suggestion if necessary,
- Employees who are experienced in making suggestion, evaluate their suggestions carefully and change them into a set of higher goals,
- Consider the level of the suggester when evaluating a suggestion. If you under estimate a person's ability, he or she will not be challenged and grow. If you expect too much, you will discharge the worker's creativity and initiative,
- Suggesters will be anxious for feedback. Evaluate suggestions promptly. If a delay is unavoidable, notify the suggester of the reason of it,
- If possible, notify the suggester evaluation results in person. Make sure to add a few words of encouragement, especially if the idea is not accepted. When providing a written notice, always add a positive comment along with the result,
- A suggestion is often a product of the suggester and his or her supervisor. Remember to compliment all contributors for their efforts.

A formal rating system should be formulated to evaluate a suggestion scheme. The rating system should provide a means for quantifying the results of evaluations and have at least the following:
- Criteria are the factors considered as the most important in assessing the feasibility of employee suggestions. The expected benefit out of the suggestion, time that will elapse before benefits will begin to be realized, and how successful suggestions made be the individual or team submitting this suggestion have been in the past.
- The actual criteria might differ from company to company. However, within the company they should be the same for all departments, to ensure consistency and fairness. Each criterion should be assigned to a numerical score or rating. This is the key to step in the entire process. It requires a judgement, common sense, a thorough knowledge of the situation in question, and an open mind.
- This is to accommodate the fact that some criteria are more important than others. The individual rating for each criterion is multiplied it is assigned to a weight factor to determine its weighted score.
- Total points and conversion scale. The weighted scores are added together to determine the total score for the suggestion. Just as numerical scores are converted to letter grades in a college class, the total score for the suggestion is converted to a level, category or grade of suggestion.

Handling poor suggestions

The best suggestion system will not completely eliminate bad suggestions. When rejecting a suggestion, precautions should be taken to maintain the employee's interest and morale.
- Listen carefully and give an opportunity to explain their suggestion in greater details. Aspects of the suggestion that

have meant or could be developed to make the suggestion more viable may not have been completely explained on a suggestion form.

- Be sure to let employees know that their suggestions are appreciated. Encourage future suggestions. If the suggestions are not accepted, make statement that suggestion did not work out, but your effort is appreciated and your ideas are valued. The organization is looking forward to your next suggestion.
- Do not make excuses or blame the company, higher management or anyone else. Explain the reasons the suggestion is not feasible and do so in a way that will help employees to make more viable suggestions in the future.
- Encourage to feedback from employees. Solicit sufficient feed back to ensure that you understand the employees and they understand you.
- It may be possible to use all or portion of a suggestion if it is modified. Never adopt a bad idea, but if a suggestion can be modified to make even part of it worthwhile, a compromise solution may be possible.

Awards and rewards

In TQM environment, it is important to recognize an achievement of employees, customers and suppliers. Every employer is to meet the requirements to get awards. Exceeding employer expectations to satisfy the performance is the most important. It is quite important that awards are given to the real achievers but it should not be a routine affair. The selection awardees should be given due to consideration, so that the few that have performed a top notch job are awarded. The awards should be for entire organizations and not be restricted to any particular discipline. The awardees should also be accepted by the others. That is the litmus test for the award. The attribute for selection best performing employees may be given through the following.

- Commitment
- Creativity
- Flexibility
- Adaptability
- Determination
- Responsibility etc.

There is no harm in warding an individual for the meritorious service, it should not cause hurdles in practicing team work in some cases. The organization should reward team as far as possible. It brings team work. The organization should put emphasis on recognizing the teams as against the individuals so that there will by harmony in the systems. The organization should select the award appropriately. It could be appreciation in an annual meeting, mementos, certificates and cash awards. It is going to matter the type of awards, the employee will definitely be motivated. The organization should periodically announce the rewards. Whichever team exceed the performance could be awarded by the same type of award. The organization should not keep on changing the type of award. The period of awards should be uniform at equal intervals. This will improve employee's satisfaction, employee's morale and employee's satisfaction as a whole. The awards should be genuine and without any bias, such awards will demotivate the others. The management should select perform teams.

4. Conclusions

In this research paper, an employee empowerment was discussed in brief. Empowerment means engaging employees in the thinking processes of an organization. Involvement means having input. Empowerment means having input that is heard and seriously considered. Empowerment requires a change in an organization culture, but does not mean that top management abdicate their responsibility or authority. An employee empowerment is necessary for the effective functioning of the skill of employee. Each employee in a team should be given a chance to act mentally to achieve their goal or targets. In a TQM organisation, a team work and an employee empowerment is essential for the effective utilization of resources, man power. This improves problem solving skill and makes an employee a good decision maker. The decision maker should bear in mind that decision arrived was of their own organization. Some researchers have examined the impact of team empowerment on creativity and innovation, while the other research discusses sometimes - hampering role of performance measures in team empowerments [15]. Employees' empowerment and improved levels of job satisfaction are facilitated by the top management leadership and commitment to the TQM goal of customer satisfactions by creating an organizational climate that emphasizes total quality and customer satisfaction. The rationale for empowerment is that it is the best way to increase creative thinking and initiate on the part of employees. The main inhibitor of empowerment is resistance to change. Resistance might come from employees, unions, and management. Management related inhibitors include insecurity, personal values. Ego, management training, personality characteristics, exclusion, organizational structure and management practice. Improving a suggestion system that involves improving both the system and individual suggestions. The system can be improved by ensuring that all suggestions receive a formal response, all suggestions are responded to immediately, monitored participation, system costs and savings. Poor suggestion can be handled without damaging morale by listening carefully, expressing appreciation, carefully explaining your position, encouraging feedback and looking for compromise. Full appreciation of the suggestion system can be achieved by removing hidden barriers, encouraging new employees and coaching reluctant employees.

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