

PERSONAL QUALITY AND TQM THE USE OF PERSONAL CHECKLISTS TO FACILITATE TQM

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Abstract

Unless quality is internalized at the personal level, it will never become rooted in the culture of an organization. Therefore, quality must start at a personal level. Employees who embrace quality as a personal value, often go beyond what they are asked or normally expected to do in order to reach a difficult goal or provide extraordinary service to a customer, leading to Total Quality at the workplace. However, no known studies in Lebanon were conducted to investigate the importance and implications of personal quality and personal checklists at the workplace. This survey studied the attitude of the administrative middle managers in Lebanon toward the importance and implications of personal quality, in general, and the use of personal checklists to facilitate TQM, in particular. The researcher conducted an exploratory survey using a 9-item questionnaire with middle level managers. The researcher concluded that the attitude of the administrative middle managers in Lebanon towards the importance and implications of personal quality can be considered positive in general, and that those managers admitted that the use of the personal checklist can facilitate TQM or can be considered a tool to apply TQM at the workplace.

Keywords: TQM, Quality, Personal Quality, Personal Checklist

Introduction

Unless quality is internalized at the personal level, it will never become rooted in the culture of an organization. Therefore, quality must begin at a personal level – and that means you! (Evans, Lindsay, 2008). As a member of the emerging generation of business leaders, managers have an opportunity and a responsibility to improve the quality of their companies and society, not just for products and services, but in everything they say and do. Total Quality Management (TQM) is a management approach that aims for long-term success by focusing on customer satisfaction. TQM is based on the participation of all members of an organization in improving processes, products, services, and the culture in which they work. One survey, conducted by a management consulting firm in Massachusetts (Rath and Strong), revealed that personal initiatives, when combined with a customer orientation, resulted in a positive impact on business success and sales growth rate. Employees who embrace quality as a personal value, often go beyond what they are asked or normally expected to do in order to reach a difficult goal or provide extraordinary service to a customer (Evans, Lindsay, 2005).

Literature Review

A definition of total quality (TQ) was endorsed in 1992 by the chairs and CEOs of nine major U.S. corporations in cooperation with deans of business and engineering departments of major universities, and recognized consultants: “Total Quality (TQ) is a people-focused management system that aims at continual increase in customer satisfaction at continually lower real cost. TQ is a total system approach (not a separate area or program) and an integral part of high-level strategy; it works horizontally across functions and departments,

involves all employees, top to bottom, and extends backward and forward to include the supply chain and the customer chain. TQ stresses learning and adaptation to continual change as keys to organizational success.” (Evans, Lindsay, 2005) On the other hand, Procter & Gamble uses a concise definition: “TQ is the unyielding and continually improving effort by everyone in an organization to understand, meet, and exceed the expectations of customers.”

Furthermore, Total Quality Management (TQM) is a process involving management and employees continually finding ways to improve their products and services. It's a combination of quality and management tools seeking to build up new business growth as well as to reduce unwanted waste while aiming at increasing productivity and profits. Total quality management incorporates the knowledge and experiences of workers using appropriate methods the first time and every time to enhance the quality of products and services. To ensure good quality work and performance, management needs to keep their workers happy and satisfied. Management needs to provide better and improved equipment along with clear task instructions for employees to follow if it wants its workers to do their job well. Keeping workers happy will encourage better performance and productivity, and will help the employees to stay at their job longer. Moreover, giving opportunities to employees and empowering them to make decisions on what they know best will decrease stress on management and improve the work environment (How TQM is Going to You're your Life Easier, 2003). Today, companies are asking employees to take more responsibility for acting as the point of contact between the organization and the customers, to be team players, and to provide more effective and efficient customer service.

According to Salvatore Moccia, in his article titled “The role of personal values in an advanced perspective to Total Quality Management”, it seems clear that personal values and quality can play an important role in the implementation of TQM programs, being the stimulators of workers' motivation. His paper represented the first attempt to integrate into TQM theory the quality values of people called upon to implement TQM programs (Moccia, article).

Bob Galvin, formerly CEO of Motorola, has listed “The Welcome Heresies of Quality”, in which he contrasts the “old testament” (ot) and the “New Truths” (NT). The first items on his list are: ot – Quality control is an ordinary company and department responsibility; and NT – Quality improvement is not just an institutional assignment, it is a daily personal priority obligation (Roberts, Sergesketter, 1993). Galvin made it plain that one key to implementing a strong quality program is personal quality. Managers can not delegate the concept of quality. One the basic views of leadership is that managers don't ask others to do what they are not willing to do themselves. In fact, managers will make progress faster by leading and showing the way than by drawing maps and telling folks where to go (Roberts, Sergesketter, 1993).

The concept of “personal quality” has been promoted by Harry V. Roberts, professor emeritus at the University of Chicago's Graduate School of Business, and Bernard F. Sergesketter, vice president of the Central Region of AT&T. Personal quality may be thought of as personal empowerment; it is implemented by systematically keeping personal checklists for quality improvement. Roberts and Sergesketter developed the idea of a personal quality checklist to keep track of personal shortcomings, or defects, in personal work processes. In their book *Quality is Personal: A Foundation for Total Quality Management*, Roberts and Sergesketter defended the use of a checklist to keep track of defects: “The word “defect” has a negative connotation for some people who would like to keep track of the times we do things right rather than times we do things wrong. Fortunately, most of us do things right much more than we do things wrong, so it is easier in practice to count the defects. Moreover, we can get positive satisfaction from avoiding defects – witness accident prevention programs that count days without accidents.” (Roberts, Sergesketter, 1993).

The personal quality checklist can be developed to improve professional activities. Each item on the checklist has a desired result, a way to measure each type of defect, and a time frame. Both work and personal defect categories can be listed (Refer to Figure 1). The defects observed during a certain period of time should than be plotted on a run chart (Refer to Figure 2).

Defect category	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thu.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.	Total
Late for meeting or appointment								
Searched for something misplaced or lost, over 20 min.								
Failure to respond to letter or phone call in 24 hours								
Failure to discard incoming junk by end of day								
Lack of clarity in setting requirements and deadlines								
Total								

Figure 1. An example of a personal checklist (to improve the office practice)

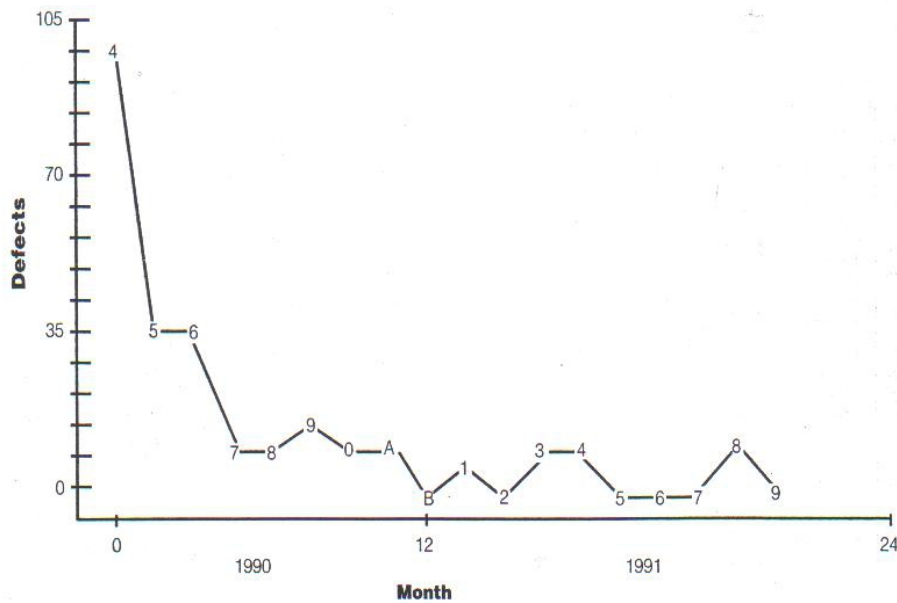


Figure 2. An example of a chart with the number of defects/month

In fact, the results could be surprising. For instance, in the case of Sergesketter, he was extremely surprised at the extent to which he was not returning phone calls on the same day. As another example, he discovered that he had no way to count defects related to correspondence. As a result, he started to date stamp correspondence when it arrived and date stamp the file copy of the response. None of the items he measured were in the “four-minute mile” category, and yet he started out at a rate of 100 defects per month, but dropped drastically simply because he was aware of them. Sergesketter also observed that when a person shares a defect list with others, they can help in reducing defects (Roberts, Sergesketter, 1993). Sergesketter noted, “I encourage and challenge you to start counting defects. It is impossible to reduce defects if we don’t count them, and we can’t reasonably ask our associates to count defects if we don’t! I really believe that if several thousand of us here in the Central Region start counting defects, we will reduce them and differentiate ourselves from our competitors in a significant way.”

Moreover, a personal checklist can help to manage time more efficiently, organize oneself personally and professionally, and keep total quality management concepts in the minds of employees who have trained for it. By listing six to ten areas to improve, either waste to be cut or value-added activities to be pursued, individuals encourage routine defect

reduction. A well-constructed checklist can also make users more efficient by their awareness of it (Petty, 2008).

According to Sergesketter, in *Create a better life with quality tools*, he believed that setting standards for personal or organization quality improvement was not difficult, but alone, it can not make a desired change. Sergesketter emphasized on the point that employees should find a way to measure against those standards, which is the only way to feel the change on the personal and professional level. He suggested a simplified form (Refer to figure 3) (Sergesketter, 2004).

Professional improvement	Month: July																															Total	Base line			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31					
On time for meetings							✓																												2	1
Phone: next day response													✓																						1	2
E-mail: within two day response																						✓	✓												2	6
Call client daily																																				
Relevant reading material																																				
Personal improvement	Month: July																															Total	Base line			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31					
Weight (190 pounds)					✓	✓						✓	✓					✓	✓	✓															7	10
Sugar intake			✓	✓				✓		✓					✓	✓																			6	9
Exercise (three times a week)																																				
No unpleasantness							✓					✓																					✓	4	5	
Resolution																																				2
	✓ Missed opportunities																																			

Figure 3. An example of a professional and personal quality checklist

On the other hand, in the daily attempt to bring about change in the individual parts of the organizational universe, managers, employees, professors, and students can find that personal quality is the key to unlock the door to a wider understanding of what the concept is really about. Personal initiatives have a positive impact on business success. Quality focused individuals often exceed customer expectations. In fact, personal quality is an essential ingredient to make quality happen in the workplace, and quality begins with personal attitudes – attitudes can be changed through awareness and effort. (Evans, Lindsay, 2008).

Bob Barrios-Choplin, Ph.D., conducted a research where he examined the effect of an Inner Quality Management (IQM) training program on 54 employees in one division in a state agency which was experiencing change-related chaos. Measures of personal and organizational quality in the trained employees were compared to those of a 64-member comparison group that had not received the training. After the completion of the training, seven weeks from the initial assessment, the study group reported significant decreases in dimensions of negative affect and stress and significant increases in dimensions of positive affect in relation to the comparison group. The results of this study further validate self-management techniques as a cost- and time-effective means to enhance employees' psychological well being and capacity to adapt efficiently and harmoniously to the challenges inherent in organizational life. Training on the personal quality level that helps individuals revise their interpretive styles and manage their mental and emotional responses to stress can be of particular value in facilitating major change implementation processes in organizations. In addition, such interventions have the potential to produce long-term improvements in employee health, performance and productivity, affecting the overall quality at the workplace (Barrios-Choplin, article).

Need for the Study

From what was stated above, it is obvious that quality is personal, and according to many researchers, it is the basis and it facilitates Total Quality Management at the workplace. However, the researcher found there is a lack of exploratory research with respect to the

attitude of the administrative middle managers in Lebanon toward the importance and implications of personal quality and the use of personal checklists to facilitate TQM.

Research Questions

Do administrative middle managers in Lebanon have a positive attitude toward the importance and implications of personal quality?

Do they agree with the use of personal checklists to facilitate the implementation of TQM?

Research Methodology

For this purpose, a survey was conducted with administrative middle managers. A sample personal checklist was distributed with the questionnaire that was carried out using a 9-item feedback form. This survey helped to calculate some statistics concerning their attitude toward the importance and implications of personal quality in general and the use of personal checklists to facilitate TQM, in particular. The questionnaire was divided into three main sections: personal-related information, work-related information, and the remaining part consisted of some questions directly related to personal quality and its implications, to personal checklists and its usage, and some general questions related to work life quality.

Different questions format were used in the questionnaire. ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ as answers were considered in some of the questions to encourage the employee answering the questions and because it forms a more defined and precise opinion, which will help to divide opinions into two categories, opposite and adjuvant. Other questions were closed ended with multiple choices to narrow the answers to only few options. Moreover, some questions were open ended, to give a chance for the employees to give their opinions freely. Finally, some questions were cross questions intended to know the credibility of the answers.

This survey was conducted with only administrative middle managers. The questionnaires were distributed and filled by managers. They were chosen randomly from different companies, different geographical locations, and different industries.

Findings

This survey studied the attitude of the administrative middle managers in Lebanon toward the importance and implications of personal quality, in general, and the use of personal checklists to facilitate TQM, in particular. After analysing the outcomes of the questionnaire, it was obvious that the majority (65%) of the employees moderately agreed that the quality of their personal life and the quality of their work life are related; only 15% strongly agreed and 20% neither agreed nor disagreed (Refer to Figure 4)

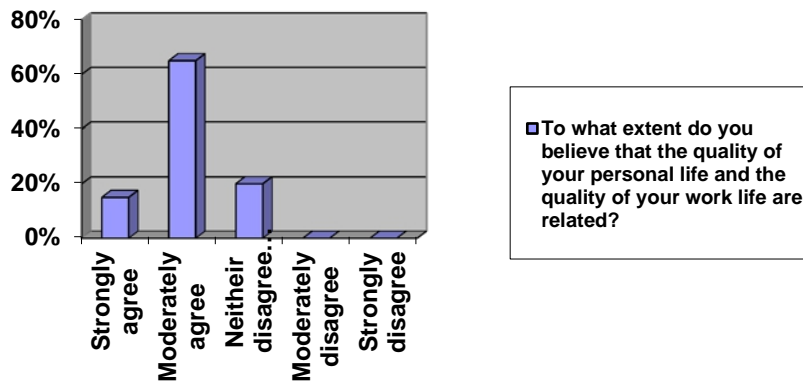


Figure 4. To what extent do you believe that the quality of your personal life and the quality of your work life are related?

Concerning the question (this was a cross question to test the credibility of the answers) whether they think personal quality is necessary to be able to conduct a quality work, 90% answered by a “Yes”. Moreover, when the interviewees were asked the reason for their belief (in an open ended question), the answers were: “it reflects on work”, “if I am not organized in my head, how can I organize work”, “it is a lifestyle”, and many others comments and opinions.

The next question was about their knowledge of the personal checklist tool, 70% have already heard about it, 20% never heard about it, and only 10% of the interviewees replied by “No answer”. However, all of the ones who had a positive answer, they said that they never tried it before.

For the question “Are you willing to try the personal quality checklist?”, the answers were 60% for “Yes”, 30% for “No”, and 10% “No answer” (Refer to figure 5).

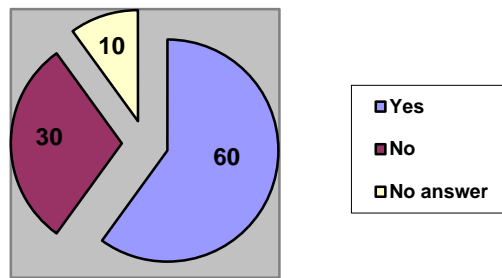


Figure 5. Are you willing to try the personal checklist?

Then the ones who were willing to try the personal checklist were asked the reason behind their answer, 95% of them believed that it is very beneficiary and 5% just wanted to try it by curiosity. On the other hand, 80% of the ones who had a negative reply, concerning their willingness to try it, believed that they don't have time to try it; only 10% believe that they don't think it is interesting, and 10% didn't reply.

The last question was about the belief of the interviewees that personal checklist can be used to facilitate TQM at work, 70% had a positive answer, 20% replied by a “No”, and only 10% didn't have an answer for that question.

Discussion

From the above results, the researcher concluded that the attitude of the administrative middle managers in Lebanon towards the importance and implications of personal quality can be considered positive in general. The survey showed that managers believe that they can't do a quality work unless they have a certain degree of personal quality. Those interviewees, although none of them have tried the personal checklist before, admitted that the use of the personal checklist can facilitate TQM or can be considered a tool to apply TQM at the workplace.

What was surprising to the researcher, however, was that although it was very clear and obvious that the use of personal checklist is very beneficiary on TQM, not all interviewees are willing to try it or apply it. Their main reason behind this, according to them, was the lack of time – and since it is a personal effort, not requested by the management, they will not do the effort to find time for it.

In fact, personal quality is an essential ingredient to make quality happen in the workplace, yet most companies have neglected it for a long time. Management are not working on improving the personal quality of their employees – knowing that the personal quality checklist can be one tool. Perhaps management, in particular, operates under the idea that promoting quality is something that companies do to employees, rather than something they do with employees.

Research Limitations

Concerning the limitations for this study, the major one was the lack of time. The researcher wasn't able to give the personal checklist in advance and ask the managers to try it for a certain period of time before filling in the questionnaire. Therefore, their opinion missed the practical part of the use of personal checklist. The other research limitation was that the questionnaire was administered only for administrative middle managers, and not a sample of all the levels.

On another hand, this research has an exploratory nature; however, some questions were included in the questionnaire with a descriptive nature, asking the opinion of the employees trying to have more specific details. This was done because, as mentioned earlier, there is no known exploratory study done in Lebanon related to this subject for the researcher to consider as a starting point for a descriptive research.

Suggestions for Future Research

As mentioned in the above section, and after conducting this exploratory research, a descriptive survey should be conducted, with interviewees from all managerial levels, to analyze and study in depth the personal quality topic and its importance and implications on the quality at the workplace, and the need for the use of the personal quality checklist as a basis for starting to apply TQM.

In addition, in order to understand deeply the importance and benefit of the use of the personal checklist, a very intensive study can be done in one particular industry, for example Higher Education. In fact, a "University Instructor Personal Checklist" can be developed and generated, with a group of instructors and the researcher, where they will identify their individual, personal, and professional areas for improvement and their targeted standards. It will be distributed at the beginning of the semester. The instructors fill it for a whole semester at the university or a particular specified period of time. At the end of every week, results (the number of defects) for every instructor will be registered on a summary form, where the researcher can monitor the improvements done. At the end of the semester, or the specified period of time, the researcher can end up with a complete study showing the improvements done on work quality level, through the use of the personal checklist.

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