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AUTHOR Wolensky, Kenneth C.
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ABSTRACT

The literature on effective measures of enhancing the participation of organized labor in Total Quality Management (TQM) initiatives was reviewed. The literature was found to be limited in terms of specific discussion of labor union commitment to TQM; instead, authors and experts on the topic focused on the importance of employee involvement, which includes the active participation of organized labor. Employee involvement was seen as synonymous with TQM, and many of the authors of the publications reviewed agreed that TQM cannot be successful if it is a management-only initiative. Included among the other findings of the review were the following: the key to obtaining union and employee acceptance is to involve them immediately and up front; accepting employee involvement and TQM requires cultural change from the way things have been to the way they can be; the extent to which employee involvement and TQM have real meaning to organizations will be learned by unions and employees via the behaviors of management; neither employee involvement nor TQM will succeed without management's trust of employees and employees' trust of management; and those closest to a given type of work know best how to improve and maintain quality. (MN)

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Enhancing Labor's Commitment to
to Total Quality Management:
A Review of Literature

by
Kenneth C. Wolensky

About the Author

Ken Wolensky is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in Adult Education at Pennsylvania State University where his research focuses on labor and workers' education. He has served in several consultative, managerial and executive positions in state and local government and has led efforts to develop and implement employee involvement, quality circle and total quality management initiatives in the public sector.

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Abstract

This paper provides a review of literature which discusses the solicitation of organized labor participation in Total Quality Management (TQM). Existing literature addresses the importance of a critical component of successful TQM: employee involvement which includes the active participation of all employees including those who are members of organized labor. The article includes a summary of key points which can be ascertained from literature regarding the achievement of greater union acceptance of TQM through employee involvement.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide a review of literature which discusses effective measures of enhancing the participation of organized labor in Total Quality Management (TQM) initiatives. Notably, literature is limited in terms of specific discussion of labor union commitment to TQM. Rather, authors and experts on this topic appear to address the importance of a critical component of successful TQM: employee involvement which includes the active participation of organized labor. Thus, employee involvement becomes synonymous with TQM.

As is noted in the following review many experts agree that TQM cannot be successful if it is a management-only initiative. Without the involvement of employees and organized labor TQM is difficult, if not impossible, to implement and maintain.

Literature Review

Rather than referring specifically to labor union participation in and acceptance of TQM, Crosby (1984) recognizes the significance of employee involvement and education in the development, implementation and ongoing maintenance of such programs. To Crosby (1984) obtaining employee commitment at all levels of the organization, from executive to middle management to rank and file is crucial. Thus, unions and their membership cannot be excluded.

Employee commitment evolves from TQM education

according to this well recognized author. He recommends that educational programs be established within the organization for the benefit of all employees and that programs be rooted in guiding principles which he refers to as "the six C's" (1984, pp. 92-93):

Comprehension - the understanding of what is necessary to bring about quality and the abandonment of the conventional way of thinking which is the key to cultural change for organizations wishing to improve.

Commitment - the expression of dedication to quality on management's part which can be achieved through setting the example and positive thinking demonstrating the determination to cause cultural change.

Competence - the implementation of the quality process in a methodological way leaving out manipulation to achieve results.

Correction - the elimination of opportunities for error by identifying current problems and their root causes and eliminating them accordingly.

Communication - the complete understanding and support of employees, suppliers and customers by reaching out to them and emphasizing their role in making quality happen.

Continuance - the remembrance of how things used to be versus how they are going to be which requires a formal effort, forever, no matter how well things are going.

A general theme in Crosby's writings is that, through education, TQM becomes the property of employees and, beyond education, employees must be involved in quality improvement teams to implement and monitor the quality process, have some say in TQM evaluation and be empowered to enact those on-the-job processes and procedures which will bring about

improvements in quality.

In addition, Crosby (1984) indicates that challenges to the traditional culture of organizations, which emphasize control and hierarchy, become evident in the successful TQM environment. Cultural changes must be manifested at the executive level and extend throughout the organization to reach all employees. Yet, he cautions, "changing a culture is not a matter of teaching people a bunch of new techniques or replacing their behavior patterns with new ones. It is a matter of exchanging values and providing role models. This is done by changing attitudes" (p. 98). Therefore to obtain cultural change which fosters union and rank and file worker commitment to employee involvement and TQM, management must set the example and practice their beliefs.

Not unlike Crosby, Grazier (1989) notes that unions typically resist employee involvement efforts at the outset and may question the true motives of management. For example, unions will typically ask the question "is management trying to get the employees to work harder?" (p.88). According to this author, the key to overcoming workforce and union resistance is to "involve them in the effort as early as possible" (p.109). Their buy-in must be obtained early in the employee involvement and quality process so as to mitigate suspicion regarding management's motives and encourage acceptance and participation in the initiative. Citing research conducted by the Economic Policy

Council, Grazier notes "where unions represent the workers, the unions must be involved as an equal partner from planning, through implementation and evaluation of the program" (p.111).

Equally as significant, Grazier (1988) emphasizes that management's behavior, level of trust and honesty in pursuing employee involvement will serve as a clear incentive or disincentive for workforce commitment to the cause. Union members will typically be supportive of greater involvement if it is clear to them, through managerial actions, that their support and active participation is sought with no hidden agenda. Management's willingness to establish an implementation plan, educational agenda and employee involvement teams with active union support is encouraged to send a clear signal of trust and honesty.

Finally, Grazier (1988) notes that old, structurally and historically established values die hard. As a result, until workers actually see the employee involvement program working some values may remain unchanged and resistance is likely to continue to be felt throughout the organization. Yet, quality improvements can only be achieved through the active participation and input of those with a vested interest in its success. Therefore, the investment of time and effort on management's behalf to demonstrate commitment to employee involvement and quality will serve well to call traditional values into question.

Harrington and ReVelle (1988) likewise note the importance of employee involvement in providing for a successful quality improvement program. Employees, whether or not they are members of organized labor, should be involved in the quality process, educated regarding TQM, informed of its uses, given some indication of performance and problems of the products and services they produce and held accountable for work pursuant to quality standards. Moreover, the authors indicate that, in the true spirit of employee involvement, control of quality should be delegated to the operational and production level of organizations and that plans for maintaining or improving quality should be documented and provided to each employee.

Tribus and Tsuda (1988) indicate that change in managerial orientation and philosophy is necessary to bring about the dedication of organized labor to the cause of quality. Thus, management holds particular responsibility to stimulate cultural change within its own ranks as well as among employees.

For example, the authors note that the hierarchical form of organization, which has been known to the world for 20 centuries, has created a culture in which "historically management has been a privilege; labor has been a commodity" (p.144). Such a notion implies that management thoughts and actions have been guided by a rationale which has perpetuated a class system within organizations. Employees

have had little recourse but to essentially accept this system and attempt to marginally reconcile economic differences between management and labor through involvement in organized labor.

However, Tribus and Tsuda (1988) argue that if quality is to be successful, change must occur in this conventional way of thinking. For change to occur "managers should not visualize themselves as sitting atop a pyramid. Rather they should think of themselves as responsible to improve the quality of the performance of systems of people, machines, processes and procedures" (p.147). Management visibility and support of quality through conscious application of employee involvement in the quality process and in decision making will foster cultural change and demonstrate a new way of thinking which breaks from tradition. Via employee involvement, workers and organized labor will see that quality is important and not just another passing fad.

Consistent with the literature cited thus far, Swanson (1992) clearly emphasizes that, when it comes to quality improvements, "persons closest to the work know best how to improve it" (p.114). As a result, the author suggests that management must exert leadership in the quality improvement process but employees must be actively engaged in its implementation and evaluation. Moreover, since improving the quality of products and services requires innovation, it is management's responsibility to foster an environment where

workforce creativity is welcomed and rewarded. Employee involvement helps to create such an environment.

Finally, in discussing the philosophy of quality as applied in one of Sweden's most successful computer marketing organizations, Svedberg (1991) cites 5 factors necessary to guide a quality organization: satisfy the customer, manage according to quality principles, prevent defects before they occur, set "zero defects" as the goal and involve all employees in the quality quest. In his view, employee involvement, at all levels of the organization, is synonymous with a successful quality initiative. Employee involvement calls for teamwork in an environment where employees are encouraged to express their thoughts and ideas freely.

Summary

It is clear from the literature noted above that several general themes can be ascertained regarding the achievement of greater union acceptance of TQM. Among these themes are the following:

- * Employee involvement is important to the success of TQM. Without employee involvement and commitment, success is difficult to obtain.
- * The key to obtaining union and employee buy-in is to involve them immediately, up-front. Hesitation in seeking employee and union support sends the wrong signals, raises suspicions and may cause the program

to fail before it has a chance to succeed.

- * Accepting employee involvement and TQM requires cultural change from the way things have been to the way they can be. The old culture is defined by terms like control, one-way communication, and hierarchy. The new culture is defined by terms like teamwork, empowerment, two-way communication and participative management (Berger, 1991).
- * The extent to which employee involvement and TQM have real meaning to the organization will be learned by the union and employees via the behaviors of management. Management must demonstrate desired behavior through implicit and explicit actions.
- * Employee involvement and, thus, TQM will not succeed without management's trust of employees and, ultimately, the employee's trust of management.
- * Those closest to the work know best how to improve and maintain quality.

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