

## **The state of total quality management: a review**

**Article reviewed:** Yong, J, Wilkinson, A (1999), "The state of total quality management: a review", The International Journal of Human Resource Management 10 (1), 137-161.

### **The contents of the article**

This article reviews the current state of total quality management by describing how it has been implemented throughout organisations worldwide, and by showing how successful it has been (from the evidence of statistical research). The authors draw on points that demonstrate that only partial TQM has been achieved in most organisations, and explain this as the reason that TQM has not been successful in the majority of organisations. Yong and Wilkinson present various factors as being obstacles in achieving total TQM.

Underpinning the majority of the article is the argument that lack of commitment, action and responsibility, from all tiers of the workforce, has led to problems when TQM has been implemented. In addition to these factors, Yong and Wilkinson also argue that; high labour turnover, cultural issues and barriers created by quality certification and measurements issues have also proved problematic for organisations that have been trying to embrace a total quality management approach.

This paper therefore examines to what extent true TQM has been implemented. The authors put much responsibility on organisations and managers who implement piecemeal TQM because they want to see a short term solution to problems, whereas they argue true TQM will take years to be fully implemented.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

Yong and Wilkinson demonstrate satisfactorily how difficult true TQM is to implement, and they do so using many different examples and statistics. The writers document well the current state of TQM, and when doing so helpfully discuss what true TQM is. Yong and Wilkinson are realistic in their view of TQM unlike many who write on the subject and they don't portray as many writers of TQM do, that the management technique is always successful. One of the major criticisms of TQM, given by writers such as Kanter (1985) has been that it is a very difficult in practice to implement, and this article recognises this fact.

Although the writers acknowledge the difficulties and problems with the implementation of TQM, they do not draw upon alternative solutions to TQM. Yong and Wilkinson fail to critique that actually total quality management is not appropriate for all organisations in all circumstances. One issue that is clear is there isn't a 'one fits all' solution to all management problems; however Yong and Wilkinson seem to indicate that TQM is the only way forward for organisation. The writers highlight areas that can be obstacles in achieving TQM, but don't come to the conclusion therefore that TQM is not for all organisations, instead they lay the blame with the managers' way of implementing TQM, not actually the theory and model of TQM itself. However, if TQM is near impossible to implement in most organisations, then

it's reasonable to assume that TQM as a management model isn't necessarily the best or even a good practice to implement.

Yong and Wilkinson do suggest that complete TQM implementation is in its decline, and this is supported by what Gill and Whittle (1993) wrote that TQM is 'at the end of its honey mood period'. This idea is so true, and this article really enforces this because it shows so clearly how many difficulties have been encountered through TQM. It appears that managers are beginning to actually realise and see comprehensively that TQM isn't actually the answer to all their organisational problems, indeed potentially it could be the beginning of many.

On balance this article doesn't criticise TQM itself, but it criticises partial TQM that has been implemented in most organisations. Yong and Wilkinson see that it has been partial TQM that has led to the demise of true TQM. This is a reasonable assumption, and is supported by many authors. Crosby in 1979 suggested that quality is free, and high quality actually costs less. But there is a degree of uncertainty to what exactly total quality management is. Yong and Wilkinson write that TQM has developed beyond the expectations of its founders. Perhaps as TQM has developed, additions to the theory have been made, and it has moved away from its one founding core principle, so now 'TQM', is more than just continuous improvement, as now it often involves and is closely associated with benchmarking, training, flexible manufacturing, empowerment of employees etc. Paton called this 'balkanisation of TQM' (1994).

Another problem with this article is what exactly Yong and Wilkinson mean by the word 'quality'. The authors seem to merge the concept of 'quality' and 'TQM' together, as if to suggest there isn't quality unless there is a TQM program in place. TQM isn't the only way to ensure that quality is engrained throughout an organisation. Yong and Wilkinson do not document the positive effects that auditing can have, and don't pay enough attention to how quality certification can actually work hand in hand with TQM philosophy to create excellent quality standards within an organisation. Contained in the paper is reference made to a study made by Powell (1995) which found that some companies were successful without a formal TQM programme. Yet Yong and Wilkinson suggest the reason these organisations were successful was because they had already acquired and implemented TQM resources as part of their own management plan. Yong and Wilkinson seem to be of the persuasion that any organisation that proclaims quality must be some way related to the umbrella term 'TQM', which isn't correct.

Within this article, Yong and Wilkinson criticise quite heavily quality certifications, mentioning the limitations of ISO 9000 and BS 5750. Although there are clearly problems associated with the quality certifications, there are also obvious positive aspects, but Yong and Wilkinson make a good point that the quality measures should not be seen as a means in themselves. This is true, and has been a pitfall to some organisations.

The central weakness to this essay is that the writers do not refer to any other management theories except TQM. Yong and Wilkinson should not nitpick that companies only take parts of the TQM philosophy onboard, because after all there are so many management theories about, that it is only logical that managers only seek to

implement parts of TQM programme that will benefit their organisation. Yong and Wilkinson don't seem to appreciate that TQM isn't suitable or sustainable for implementation in all organisations which explains why only 'partial' TQM has been chosen to be implemented in many organisations. Yong and Wilkinson seem to think that companies who apply partial TQM are trying to achieve complete TQM, when realistically this is not at all the case.

The writers do not sufficiently explain the core underlying problem that goes beyond TQM, or indeed any other management solution, such as BPR or downsizing etc. This is the fact that TQM and other management techniques have not been as successful as many thought they would have been, because they are merely management 'fads' (Grint, 1997). Hence, managers have chosen to take the best parts of recent 'fads', and use them within their organisations, instead of adopting fully every part of the programmes proposed by top management 'Gurus'.

Yong and Wilkinson fail to discuss why TQM has become so popular and why it has developed to the status it has now. Grint (1997), states that every year on average one new management fashion emerges and he believes that the main reason the majority of managers implement TQM or other such 'fads' or 'management trends' is because they see other companies doing it, and so they follow suit as they don't want to miss out on an opportunity to possibly radically change their organisation in the vain hope it will have dramatic positive effect.

Nevertheless, the paper does manage to show, what factors have lead to prohibiting total TQM programme being implemented. These factors are largely related to the way in which much of modern day western management is focused on short term goals and outcomes, and so this has led to full scale TQM programmes not being enforced because managers do not have the long-term vision which is required to change an organisations culture (Watson, 2002).

Yong and Wilkinson outline clearly that many managers in western organisations are motivated to find short term solutions to organisational problems. Unfortunately, Yong and Wilkinson did not then follow this conclusion up with suggestions of how, management solutions other than TQM, such as BPR can have positive effects on issues such as quality and employee moral. As highlighted earlier, the core failure of the article is that other management techniques are not well documented. Once the writers had identified the point that many organisations want to see short term solutions; a 'zap' approach to problems, they should have discussed other techniques other than TQM, or indeed partial TQM. Business Process Reengineering (BPR) for example, has proved successful in many organisations. Hammer and Champy (1993), the grandfathers of BPR, defined it as 'the fundamental rethinking and radical redesign of business processes to achieve dramatic improvements in critical contemporary measures of performance such as cost, quality, service and speed.' Yet BPR along with other techniques were not mentioned in this paper, and although this paper was intended to evaluate the current state of TQM, it would have been useful for the authors to have compared TQM to other management techniques such as BPR, so as to clarify how TQM compares with other management 'fads' and 'fashions'.

## **Conclusion**

This article does help advance the knowledge and understanding of the implementation of TQM within many organisations today. The paper clearly shows what have been the barriers to the full implementation of TQM and why 'partial' TQM has been realised in most organisations. Knowing the barriers to the full development of TQM enables organisations to be able to judge whether it is worth implementing a full TQM programme.

Yong and Wilkinson show that full TQM programmes require many years to be developed, and thus, managers who try to implement TQM as a means to finding a quick solution often fail to develop a TQM philosophy within their organisation, and so completely miss out on what TQM actually is.

Although this article has added knowledge and understanding to how effectively TQM is being implemented in organisations, it does not expand the readers knowledge on other management techniques. Yong and Wilkinson don't explain sufficiently well, why TQM has become so popular, and don't identify what has been the reason for the rise in success of TQM programmes. The concept of TQM being a management 'fad' which is coming to the end of its life, hence the reason why TQM implementation is becoming less effective, is not dwelt upon in enough detail. Many critics of management 'fads' including Grint believe the key to popularity of management trends is not the trend itself, but what attracts managers to the 'fads' is actually change in itself. Indeed Grint crudely states that he thinks managers have a 'fetish' for change (Fuzzy Management, 1997, p35). Yong and Wilkinson and have shown there is a decline in the interest in TQM, and in the effectiveness of it, so perhaps one can conclude that this has been because other management 'fads' such as BPR have replaced TQM as the leading theories in management.

Even though TQM is seen as by some as a 'fad', Yong and Wilkinson do show how it has been successful within some organisations. And so, this article perhaps suggests that in fact TQM, isn't merely a passing 'fad' that has been a failure, but actually its implementation within some organisations has been a success. Yong and Wilkinson say that the problem with TQM implementation now is that the majority of managers who are trying to implement it are managers with short term objectives to see improvement, and hence the reason why sustainable increases have not been seen in performance. And so the writers more-a-less state the reason TQM hasn't been successful in many western organisations as being because of the way TQM has been introduced; the way it has not mirrored how TQM works within Japanese Car Manufacturing plants such as Nissan or Toyota. This article is helpful because Yong and Wilkinson also show how 'TQM' has moved from its origins, as it now incorporates many things, including JIT, Quality Circles, Empowerment etc. TQM has moved away from being a continual improvement philosophy to meaning something different, a theory which now involves various additional efforts. It is perhaps these extensions of TQM that had 'muddied the water', and prevented pure TQM being implemented as it has become so much more than just continuous improvement. Perhaps is the fault of Gurus who have tried to present 'new' ideas, by building on previous theories and ideas.

From coming out of this article, we can see that 'TQM' has become a very wide title, and the definition has become very broad. Thus, research that has been carried out on TQM is ambiguous because there is always uncertainty as to what TQM exactly entails. Even though this is the case, Yong and Wilkinson have presented different research findings well, and so given the reader a variety of results to consider. Although the writers have done that well, Yong and Wilkinson don't look in detail into why TQM has been implemented, and why there is a need within organisations for change, and how exactly TQM can benefit organisations.

So in conclusion, this article does well in expanding knowledge on TQM as an improvement theory and identifies reasons why TQM programmes haven't been successful. This is useful as Yong and Wilkinson identify what areas are likely to cause problems when TQM is implemented, however future research in this field could include how organisations have overcome these obstacles (Morris, Haigh, Kanji, 1994), as this would be of more benefit than merely stating the problems associated with TQM.

As mentioned earlier Yong and Wilkinson could have looked at other management 'fads' and could have documented to what extent TQM has been more successful. Even though it is useful to see improvements TQM has made within organisations, it is better to be able to compare the effects of TQM to different management techniques so as to gauge how TQM stands against techniques such as BPR or outsourcing.

Because there are so many critics of management techniques and management Gurus, (such as Gill and Whittle or Grint), it is important to know to what extent TQM and other techniques have proved effective within organisations. Grint argues that 'BPR and TQM are accepted and regurgitated, not because they may be evaluated as objectively 'good' ideas, but because they are fashionable ideas' (Fuzzy Management, 1997, p44). As TQM fades out of fashion, it will be interesting to see to what extent the philosophy is maintained within organisations that adopted it, and it is this which will prove, whether or not, total quality management is really a 'fad', or if it is an objectively good idea.

## **Bibliography**

### **Books**

- Buchanan, D, and Huczynski, A (1997), (Third Edition), *Organizational Behaviour: An Introductory Text* (Prentice Hall).
- Crosby, P (1979), *Quality is free: the art of making quality certain* (New York: McGraw-Hill).
- Gopal, K (1994), *Total Quality Management* (Carfax).
- Grint, K (1997), *Fuzzy Management: Contemporary ideas and practises at work* (Oxford University Press).
- Hammer, M, Champy, J (1993), *Reengineering the Corporation* (New York).
- Kanter, R (1985), *Change Masters: Corporate Entrepreneurs at Work* (London: Allen & Unwin).
- Watson, T.J (2002), *Organising and managing work* (Financial Times: Prentice Hall).

### **Journals**

- Gill, J, Whittle, S (1993), "Management by Panacea: Accounting for Transience", *Journal of Management Studies*, 30 (2), 281-295.
- Jackson, Norman, Carter, Pippa (1992), "Post modern management", *International Studies of Management & Organisations* 22 (3), 11.
- Morris, D, Haigh, R, Kanji, G (1994), "How to stop quality improvement teams from quitting", *Total Quality Management*, 5 (4), 161-168.
- Paton, S (1994), *Is TQM dead?*, *Quality Digest*, April.
- Yong, J, Wilkinson, A (1999), "The state of total quality management: a review", *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 10 (1), 137-161.