

Exploring Employee Involvement and Quality Management Practices: A Review of the Literature

Kit Fai PUN

Department of Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering,
The University of the West Indies, St Augustine Campus, Trinidad and Tobago, West Indies
E-mail: kfpun@eng.uwi.tt

Abstract

The trend towards employee involvement (EI) has redefined the employer-employee relationship and, for many organisations, has brought about a fundamental change in organisational performance. This paper begins with a review of EI concepts and typologies. It goes on to elaborate need for the adoption of EI practices and discuss the factors affecting the adoption. The main theme of the quality management (QM) literature will then be presented addressing its concepts, principles and elements. Drawing on the theoretical and practitioners' perspectives, the paper also discusses the significance of integrating EI/QM practices to sustain organisational performance improvement.

Key Words: Employee involvement, quality management, TQM

1. Introduction

Traditionally, many companies structured themselves to maximise employee control and tend to underutilise employees, relegating them to narrow jobs requiring limited capability. Other firms concentrated on portfolio strategies, investment in automation, offshore production and other approaches that ignore human capital [1]. Faced with today's dynamic and competitive environment, such practices need to be changed. Advocates of the human resource perspectives [e.g. 2-4] believe that employees should be treated fairly and with respect, and that cooperation with management should be encouraged. They contend that emphasis should be placed on employees as valuable resources, that the managers should arrange work so that the employees' personal goals and those of the organisation are in support of one another. Employee involvement (EI) is concerned with providing employees with the means to participate in and take ownership of the change effort that is central in leading effective and lasting change [5].

On the other hand, significant shifts in competitive edge have been sharpening the needs for continuous quality improvement. Many companies have taken their initiatives to employ different quality excellence awards (e.g. the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA), European Quality Award (EQA), etc.) and quality standards (e.g. BS 7750, ISO 9000, and AS 9000, etc.) in one form or another to document, implement quality management (QM) practices and verify continued compliance. These awards and standards are commonly adopted as a means of recognising the achievements of QM practices. Many proponents argue that EI and QM practices can change the structure and management systems of an enterprise and improve organisational performance [5-7].

Although the phenomenon is no longer new, EI and QM continue to command growing interest among both academics and management practitioners alike, as evidenced by various aspects of research that have been carried out on this area [8-10]. This paper looks at the literature dealing with the EI concepts and typologies and explaining the factors affecting EI adoption. The linkage of EI with QM practices is explored. The paper concludes by addressing the need for integrating EI/QM efforts in improving organisational performance.

2. Concepts of Employee Involvement

Since the 1970s, considerable emphasis has been put on delegation in order to manage the span of control. Delegation was advocated to improve the quality of life, and theories of EI and participative management (PM) have been developed [1,11]. EI theories stress cascading power, information, rewards and training to the lowest level possible in the organisational hierarchy to increase worker discretion [1,3], while PM advocates that managers share decision making power with employees to enhance performance and work satisfaction [11]. According to Delaney [12], the term participation has been used to refer to the existence of organisational structures or mechanisms that give employees a voice in workplace decisions and to describe a wide variety of EI programmes.

A few writers have, however, attempted to delineate perceived differences between them. Kaler [13] contends that, in the organisational context, participation is any arrangement under which employees have some sort of share in some aspect of a business, not a specific kind of EI. Marchington [14] have used employee participation as an umbrella term covering all forms of employee influence. EI is used to describe managerially inspired initiatives aimed at winning employee commitment, as part of the practices of industrial democracy, whose

aim is to increase the rights of employees to participate in management decisions. In the delayed organisations, it is important for management to give employees the power to make quick decisions, get their commitment and enable them to determine their own destiny [8].

Employee empowerment was another management phenomenon of the 1980s and 1990s. The concepts and practices of empowerment were derived from the theories of EI and PM [7, 15-17]. According to Cunningham and Hyman [18], there is no single or simple definition of empowerment. Various writers have defined it in general terms as passing on previously withheld authority down the hierarchy [19]. Earlier works equate it with participative decision making [20] or attach to it the organisational development meaning of participation [21].

Some writers see empowerment as a recent and advanced manifestation of EI, and as part of management strategy which contributes directly to organisational objectives. Others see it as a popular managerial initiative under the aegis of EI [16,22]. Johnson and Redmond [23] contend that it is a 'pinnacle of employee involvement' operationalised by way of a process consisting of five essential steps (such as informing, consulting, sharing, delegating, and empowering). Lawler *et al.* [24,25] argue that the top management should learn to 'trust' their people and give them power to be innovative and bring about changes.

3. Employee Involvement Typologies

EI as it is popularly known today was borne out of a fundamental belief in the benefits of creating positive human relations within the organisation [2]. It has become a broad term encompassing an extremely broad range of concepts, and has evolved into a management approach that is multidimensional in nature. Although a great deal has been researched and written about it over the past decades, Lawler *et al.* [25] argue that knowledge about EI is still developing, and a great deal more needs to be learned. Several EI typologies found in the literature can be traced back to the 1970s [26]. There are as many different dimensions of analysis and application of the concept as there are interpretations of its meaning [2]. The concepts, assumptions, and roots upon which it has been founded are promulgated by way of a plethora of practices and programmes implemented in organisations today. A review of the literature reveals a number of typologies relevant for analysing the concepts, assumptions and roots in which EI can be located.

3.1 Traditional Versus Current Perspectives

Traditionally, employees have been involved in decision-making processes through indirect participation, i.e. employees are involved in the process of management decision making via their representatives, who are typically elected by and from employee groups [27]. Direct participation initiatives are concerned with a face-to-face (or written) contact between managers and their subordinates. Employees are involved on a direct, individual level, rather than through representatives to improve the quality of working life and to combat problems such as labour turnover, absenteeism, recruitment and retention [2]. Current EI developments are primarily concerned with enhancing business performance and are linked to strategic goals such as innovation, customer satisfaction and flexibility. The economic participation of employees, for example, through share ownership or profit sharing schemes could affect the success or failure of an enterprise [7,27].

3.2 Employee Involvement Continuum

Recent research has noted how organisations may implement EI initiatives to different degrees, and how the extent to which staff are encouraged, enabled, and empowered to contribute to the improvement process can be mapped onto an EI continuum [28]. At the lowest end of the continuum, there is minimal involvement, with employees being informed of decisions but playing no part in these decisions. Such involvement reflects a traditional, more Tayloristic managerial approach. Further along the continuum is suggestion involvement, characterised by suggestion schemes, quality circles and other types of problem-solving groups. As part of these schemes, employees are involved in identifying, analysing and solving problems that will have an influence on the operation of the organisation. The furthest along the EI continuum is job involvement, in which the focus shifts towards work redesign, which requires some change in the basic organisational structures. Workgroups or teams become the primary unit of this sort of involvement. This approach represents a shift away from viewing EI in terms of specific initiatives.

Several advocates the classification of EI types loosely in terms of degrees, locating them on a continuum in which the lowest level shows minimal, passive involvement, and the upper levels indicate autonomy and self-management accorded to employees. Ang [2] argues that the approach to practical implementation varies from having tasks and activities that are centred on the individual, to those that are collective in form and function, to be carried out by groups or teams.

3.3 Levels and Types of Involvement

EI is not just one form but may take a variety of levels and types. Richardson [29] uses a hierarchy based on three levels of involvement. The first level is reached when management makes a major effort to improve communication and attitudes, but still views employees as relatively passive. The second level is reached when management seeks actively to involve employees in productivity improvement and cost management. At the third level, management views employees as partners in the enterprise and rewards efforts through gain sharing or profit sharing schemes. Lawler *et al.* [24] classify EI types into suggestion involvement, job involvement, and business involvement. The range of specific EI approaches placed under the three classifications are suggestion system, survey feedback, job enrichment or redesign, quality circles, employee participation groups, union-management quality of work life, mini-business units, self-managing work teams, and employee committees concerned with policy and/or strategy.

Van Aken and Monetta [30] contend that the many types of EI can be grouped into two basic categories. Firstly, supplemental initiatives consist of suggestion systems, quality circles, ad hoc participation groups, and cross-functional task forces, which are more common and are programmes that form part of the parallel organisation structure intended to facilitate communication, coordination, and opportunities for change. The second category comprises institutionalised initiatives, such as self-managing work teams, which make problem solving, decision-making, and managing the work process part of the day-to-day job. Moreover, Oosthuizen and du Toit [27] refer to the extent to which employees (or their representatives) influence final decisions. The whole spectrum of involvement ranges from employees simply being informed about decisions by management, through two-way communication, to situations in which employees have joint or full control over decisions [2].

4. Adoption of Employee Involvement Practices

Over the years, the adoption of EI practices has been recognised as a means to drive organisations towards empowered performance improvement [5,7]. Many leading companies have come up with very creative and effective solutions to help organisational development and renewal. It can be seen in delivering service excellence and business process re-engineering that quick responses to customers' needs are important. One way the management can manage effectively in a delayed structure is to involve and empower

employees.

Effective involvement allows employees to act professionally at work within their authorities. It also responds to job-related problems and suggests alternatives efficiently and effectively [10,31]. Getting employees involved is easier said than done. Many managers see EI and empowerment as the giving away of control [32]. True empowerment is only achieved by effective involvement based on establishing quality policy and valid indicators, providing training to employees and encouraging them to use the latest quality improvement and mistake proofing techniques everyday [33].

Having regards to different types, forms and approaches of EI, Dale and Cooper [34] argue that each of them is attempting to meet any one or more of the four principles of humanisation at work. These include:

1. Security - employees need to be free from fear and anxiety concerning health and safety, income and future employment.
2. Equity - employees should be compensated commensurately with their contribution to the value of the service or product.
3. Individuation - employees should have maximum autonomy in determining the rhythm of their work, and in planning how it should be done.
4. Democracy - employees should, wherever possible, manage themselves, be involved in the decision-making that affects their work, and accept greater responsibility in the work of the organisation.

York [32] advocates that true involvement draws people lower on the hierarchy up to the levels above them and then shares the power that is available. It is about the redistribution of power and authority so that person can reach his or her maximum potential. Without these changes, there is no true involvement and empowerment and is only a readjustment of responsibilities [4,32]. In order to ascertain the EI efforts, Randolph [35] presents an implementation plan for EI practices that shares information, creates autonomy through structure, and lets teams become the hierarchy.

Moreover, Lawler *et al.* [24] assert that employees at various levels need power sharing, information sharing, knowledge training, and reward systems that are relevant to organisational performance. There has been mounting evidence that for employees to become truly empowered, senior management must push the four fundamental elements downward through the organisation: vision/value/strategy sharing, information flow, relevant training, and power/authority sharing [25]. Mohrman *et al.* [9] add that these elements need to be moved

to the lowest level of the organisation. EI requires strong support and commitment from the top management. Knowledge training and clear instruction of authorisation are necessary for employees to act [33].

5. Factors Affecting EI Practices

From the EI literature, various principles, elements and attributes that affect EI adoption were advocated [4,6,10,37]. Different approaches of EI adoption would vary with the kinds of organisational changes required, the amount of influence afforded on employees, and the results expected. The EI process generally required fundamental changes in leadership practices, skills and abilities, information sharing and rewards. These changes go to the core of the organisation's values, beliefs and norms about work behavior [36]. Mohrman *et al.* [9] argue that employees at different levels need to be given power, knowledge, information and rewards that are relevant to business and operations performance. An excerpted list of factors that affect the adoption of EI practices is given in **Table 1** below.

Table 1. Factors affecting the adoption of EI practices

Critical Factors/Benefits	Sub-factors
1. Management Commitment	- Corporate Mission - Participative Management - Continuous Improvement
2. Team Building and Teamwork	- Common Goals - Team Leadership - Cross-functional Teams
3. Education and Training	- Technical Skills - Problem-Solving Skills - Communication Skills
4. Rewards and Motivation	- Intrinsic Rewards - Extrinsic Rewards
5. Anticipated Benefits	- Quality Improvement - Productivity Enhancement - Employee Satisfaction

Sources: Based on Pun *et al.* [4]

5.1 Management Commitment

Management commitment is the driver of any EI practice [4,8,36]. EI programmes are often doomed to failure if management support and commitment is not obtained and if instability develops [4]. With the management commitment, clear *corporate mission* can help employees respond to the organisation's development needs. Common values shared by the entire organisation are crucial to give employees a clear sense of direction, communicate the guiding principles, provide people with the tools they need to build a winning team and establish boundaries of freedom [6].

To attain corporate objectives, top management should lead the way, whereas middle management should facilitate the whole process and front-line operations should follow. Recent studies have showed that active support and participation of senior management is required for any organisational change that seeks greater involvement of employees [33]. Both senior and middle management should provide support and a positive organisational environment (in terms of information sharing, knowledge training, appraisal and rewards), evaluate the situation and set guidelines, react quickly to any negative impact, encourage employees to participate, and empower them to execute tasks. Employees should also understand the management's expectations.

There are psychological benefits in allowing people to participate, resulting in a positive effect on performance and work satisfaction [38]. *Participative management* is a way of doing business that pools the efforts of knowledgeable and affected employees in workplace decision making and problem solving. It promotes higher quality decisions by allowing employees who have the necessary knowledge and information, regardless of their level, to make decisions whenever possible and appropriate [39]. Participative management can extend the organisational input with information sharing and authority/power sharing, and motivate people involved in solving problems in relation to productivity, absenteeism, turnover and disciplinary orders, as well as firing and hiring matters. Furthermore, an emphasis on *continuous improvement* can help the management build up corporate values and foster organisation-wide employee involvement [4,10]

5.2 Team-Building and Teamwork

Converting from an environment based on manpower to a team-based organisation takes time and effort [4,40]. *Team building and teamwork* allows people who work together in an interdependent way to discuss mutual or individual concerns, to exchange ideas for solving problems and to share experiences. Dale and Cooper [34] argue that teams are an essential

part of organisations. Effective team building provides a satisfying, stimulating and enjoyable working environment that can make things happen, solve problems and achieve results [41].

Teamwork is designed to bring people together, but also to ensure they have *common goals* in line with the organisation's needs and objectives. There is also evidence that setting goals has a positive effect on performance and work satisfaction [38]. Good *team leadership* helps develop the entire work force in alignment with company's goals, and promote participation and creativity of team members in expressing their opinions and developing ideas. This, in turn, strengthens the EI influence on improving employee satisfaction and productivity [4]. Many problems in organisations are complicated by cross functionality. Formation of *cross-functional teams* can enhance inter- and intra-departmental communications by minimising the misunderstanding among departments. These teams can collaborate to diagnose complex problems and help generate solutions.

5.3 Training and Education

Provision of *training and education* is not the only answer to quality and performance improvement, but it is definitely vital for employees to learn and improve. Well-planned training maximises employee abilities, knowledge and skills appropriate to their roles and responsibilities within the corporate structure [4]. Effective employee education brings them to a higher level of efficiency with a commitment to performance quality. For instance, employees become familiar with specific machines, tools, working instructions and procedures through training in technical skills related to their jobs and responsibilities. Employees foster quality of work and performance with *problem-solving skills* and quality control tools. Moreover, in handling numerous daily interpersonal interactions and co-ordination among employees, acquiring *communication skills* facilitates group problem-solving process. Jeffries *et al.* [42] argue that this helps employees establish a sense of unity, common goals and mutual respect.

5.4 Rewards and Motivation

Many practitioners and scholars argue that employees may resist changes or are not eager to learn new skills for some reasons such as worker alienation and job dissatisfaction [9,43]. In some circumstances, people may feel uncomfortable with the environment they are unfamiliar. *Rewards and motivation* can be an effective means to getting people to participate in organisational decisions [43]. *Intrinsic rewards* stress the recognition and appreciation of employee's good performance. The recognition can come from the

management, peers and subordinates. On the other hand, *extrinsic rewards* are commonly given to employees in terms of money, promotion and some forms of special privileges. There are various extrinsic reward schemes for different organisations and practices, including all-salaried pay systems, knowledge/skill-based pay systems, profit and gain sharing [9,24]. Some studies found that both *intrinsic rewards* and *extrinsic rewards* can bring meaningful and motivational effects depending largely on the varied organisational situations and constraints [43].

5.5 EI Benefits

Practitioners and researchers maintain that positive relationships between employee attitudes (e.g. commitment, involvement and satisfaction) and productivity measures (e.g. performance, turnover and absenteeism) produce meaningful economic results [4]. Rodrigues [44] contends that empowered work environment affirms the value of employees in creating a quality culture. Chu [45] argues that EI can help achieve better implementation of customer focus, quality and continuous improvement. Gatchalian [15] also suggests that EI strategy aimed at fostering worker communication results in higher productivity, greater employee satisfaction and lower employee turnover. According to Lindsay and Petrick [39], EI practices support the management's right and duty to manage and to continue making key business and operations decisions. EI would produce positive changes in:

1. Culture: the new culture or atmosphere, gives employees flexibility and independence as they take responsibility for, and are held accountable for, meeting overall objectives.
 2. Commitment: Employees support and are willing to implement their own departments' goals, plans and decisions as well as those of a company
 3. Ownership: Employees feel that they are part of, and have ownership in, their work and their company.
 4. Communication: Employees can communicate freely upward, downward and among departments.
 5. Co-operation: Employees work together as a team within their own departments and with employees of other departments.
 6. Openness, trust and respect: Employees feel comfortable in openly expressing their opinions.
 7. Participation: Employees feel that their degree of involvement is appropriate for each situation.
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However, it is not magic for organisations to gain any EI benefits. EI is a process by which people involved take responsibility for the achievement of corporate goals and realisation of potential [46].

6. About Quality Management Practices

The management literature during the last few decades saw a tremendous increase in the attention paid to the quality concepts and practices of quality management [6]. For instance, reduction of variation, continuous improvement of products and services, design quality, speed and prevention, zero defects, cost of poor quality, leadership, people participation and partnership, cross functional management, systematic approach to quality and strategic focus with respect to customer satisfaction, competitiveness, profitability, quality planning and organisation-wide commitment are the major concepts and factors that are introduced by quality gurus and practitioners in one form or another in managing quality [47].

6.1 Concepts of Quality Management

QM can be regarded as a systematic way of guaranteeing the organised activities happens the way they are planned [48,49]. This is concerned with preventing problems from occurring by creating the attitudes, behavior, and controls that prevent defects from happening in the company's performance cycle. Systems for improving and managing quality have evolved rapidly in recent years [47,50]. These involve the design and operation of systems and technology, and fostering a work-force commitment to quality, in order that a company can consistently produce goods and service that satisfy customer requirements. The systems also involve increasing the skills, and engaging the efforts of all members of an organisation to enable them to contribute to problem solving and the pursuit of zero defects demanded by this philosophy of continuous improvement in all activities [51].

Camison [52] summarises the paradigmatic shift of QM practices from product orientation towards customer orientation (see **Figure 1**). The dramatic shift in QM perspective has solicited senior management interest and involvement, linking quality with profitability and its inclusion in the strategic business planning process. Its acceptance as a managerial philosophy, which impacted employees, has concomitant human resource implications [50,51].

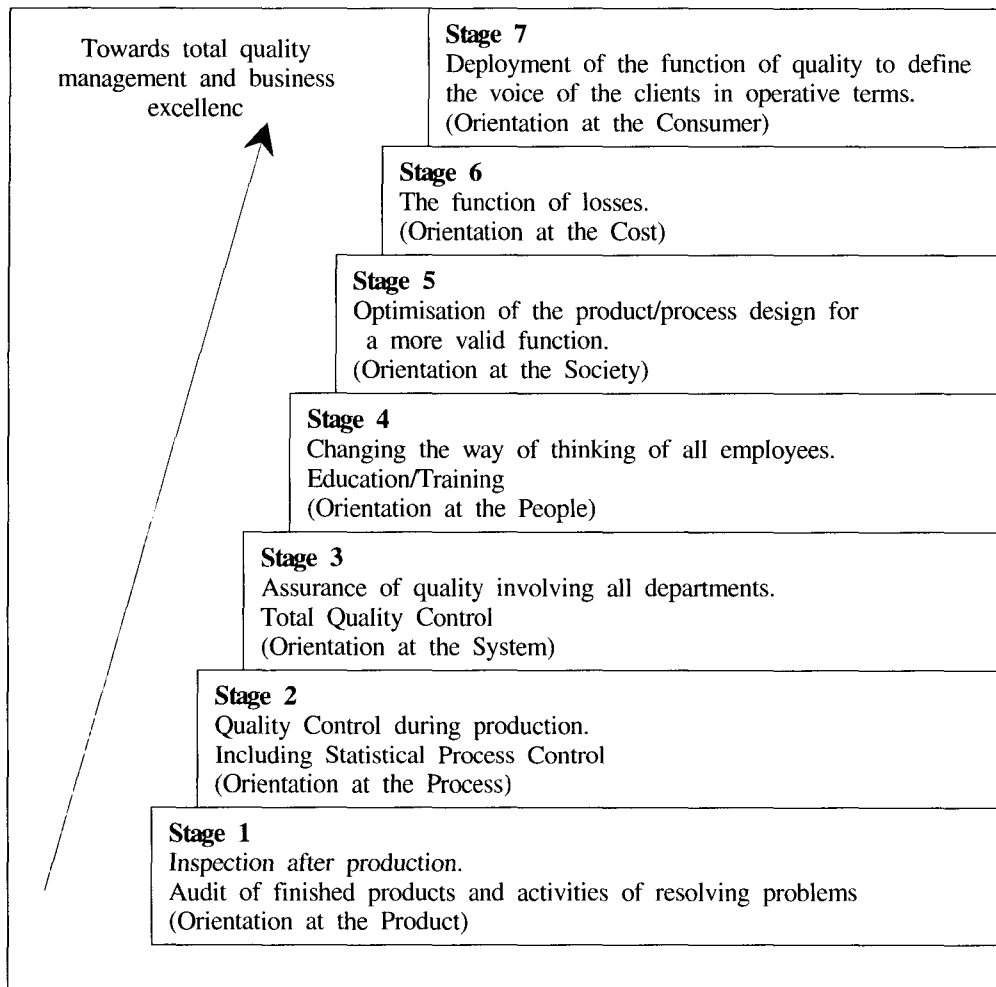


Figure 1. The paradigmatic shift of quality management practices

Source: Based on Camison [52, pp.485]

6.2 Towards Total Quality Management

Total quality management (TQM) is widely regarded as both a philosophy and a set of guiding principles that represent the foundation of a continuously improving organisation. It integrates fundamental management techniques, existing improvement efforts and technical tools under a disciplined approach [53]. Feigenbaum [54] argues that TQM leads an organisation having long-term commitment to ongoing improvement of quality throughout its whole system, with active employee participation at all levels in all sub-units and

subsidiaries. TQM stresses doing things right the first time and producing goods and/or services that meet or exceed consumers' expectations at the lowest possible cost [49,55]. It strives to create an organisational culture that fosters continuous improvements in everything by everyone all the time, and requires changes in organisational processes, strategic priorities, individual belief, attitudes and behaviours [6].

TQM is a non-prescriptive philosophy with limited solid instructions in putting the principles into practices. There is no perfect consensus in terms of what are the core elements and principles of TQM. Different proponents would emphasise different features of TQM. For instance, Deming [56] introduces his 14 points of TQM, while Juran [55,57] advocates his trilogy on quality planning, control and improvement. Crosby [48,49] looks into the procedural aspects and proposes his 14 quality steps. **Table 2** lists several TQM features promoted by Deming [56], Crosby [49] and Juran [55].

Table 2. Selected TQM features promoted by quality guru

Deming's 14 Points ¹	The Juran Trilogy ²	Crosby's 14 Quality Steps ³
Constancy of Purpose	I. <i>Quality Planning</i>	1. Management commitment
2. Adopt the Philosophy	1. Set goals	2. Quality improvement teams
3. Do not rely on mass inspection	2. Identify customers and needs	3. Quality measurement
4. Do not award business on price	3. Develop products and processes	4. Cost of quality evaluation
5. Constant improvement		5. Quality awareness
6. Training	II. <i>Quality Control</i>	6. <i>Corrective action</i>
7. Leadership	4. Evaluate performance	7. <i>Zero-defects committee</i>
8. Drive out fear	5. Compare to goals and adapt	8. <i>Supervisor training</i>
9. Break down barriers	III. <i>Quality Improvement</i>	9. <i>Zero-defects day</i>
10. <i>Eliminate slogans/exhortations</i>	6. <i>Establish infrastructure</i>	10. <i>Goal-setting</i>
11. <i>Eliminate quotas</i>	7. <i>Identify projects and teams</i>	11. <i>Error cause removal</i>
12. <i>Pride of workmanship</i>	8. <i>Provide resources and training</i>	12. <i>Recognition</i>
13. <i>Education and retraining</i>	9. <i>Establish controls</i>	13. <i>Quality councils</i>
14. <i>Plan of action</i>		14. <i>Do it over again</i>

Sources: Based on ¹Deming [56], ²Juran [55] and ³Crosby [49]

The shift from traditional management to TQM is revolutionary and the TQM implementation involves a fundamental change in the way in which business is conducted [58]. These changes include making customers a top priority, a relentless pursuit of continuous improvement of business processes, and managing the systems of the organisation through teamwork. Moving towards the TQM paradigm is not a simple process. This

requires organisational changes and an integration of human resources into various aspects of a business in a dynamic organisational system [59].

For implementing TQM, Tenner and DeToro [60] suggests three principles (such as customer focus, process improvement and total involvement) and six elements (such as leadership, education and training, supportive structure, communication, reward and recognition, and measurement). Clover [61] stresses the working relationship of staff, communication channels and empowerment of workers. Powell [53] contends that a TQM approach tend to share the twelve components including leadership, communication, closer customer relationships, closer supplier relationships, benchmarking, training, open organisation, employee empowerment, zero-defects mentality, flexible operation, process improvement and measurement. Moreover, Costin [62] suggests eleven core elements of TQM, including:

1. Excellence is ascribed to customer-driven organisations that systematically integrate customer feedback into their strategic planning and delivery of products and services.
2. Customer-driven organisations have a strong focus on quality, with quality being defined as both the measurable dimensions of products and services and the perceptions of internal and external customers.
3. Continuous improvement is the result of a focus on quality.
4. Improvement means making the processes work better.
5. There is a strong need to extend the existing mind-set and shift to paradigms that see organisational and individual success as a result of collaboration rather than cut-throat competition.
6. Decisions should be data driven. Previous experience needs to be systematically documented and analysed to achieve continuous improvement.
7. Teamwork is the practical application of 'collaboration'. In order to be effective, teams need to be trained in creative and analytical problem-solving techniques.
8. People should be empowered, that is, have real input and decision-making power in job design and organisational policies that affect them.
9. Training and recognition are essential; and TQM begins and ends with education.
10. A vision that needs to be known and shared by all employees and managers is the key to give any organisation a unified direction and avoid wasteful duplication of efforts and infighting.
11. Organisational change is only possible through effective leadership by example. Empty promises and speeches only make existing problems worse.

Paper and Rodger [63] argues that top management, empowered workers, customer

satisfaction, open communication, and a strong project champion could greatly safeguard the implementation of QM initiatives. Shin *et al.* [64] assert that TQM is not a short-term fix, and hence a never-ending commitment is required. Quality awareness can be initiated by quality education and training and supported by structural and progressive change of management systems. An appropriate quality culture keeps the management system operating smoothly and improving consistently. Besides, the formation of multidisciplinary quality teams across different departments would facilitate the quality efforts on a continuous basis. Implementing TQM relies significantly on the commitment and leadership of top management and a supportive organisational culture and management system created by them [6,65].

The outcome of TQM implementation is a set of behaviours, attitudes and processes that prevail throughout the stages of design, production, service marketing and administration to produce high quality, defective free goods and services at a quality and cost suited to the market and with dependable delivery [4]. Although many empirical studies have not shown that TQM firms consistently outperform non-TQM firms [53,66], TQM represents an integrative approach for today's organisations in the pursuit of performance improvement.

7. Integrating EI with Quality Management Practices

Many organisations have had experienced difficulties in implementing QM practices effectively because of a lack of EI efforts [4]. Managers who are used to paternalistic and dictatorial mode of management will have difficulties in delegating responsibility down the line and therefore, will fail to make QM work. Many recent studies [4,22,67] show that adoption of EI practices can foster performance, release latent knowledge and skills, produce better solutions to problems, enhance acceptance of decisions, reduce resistance to change and stress levels, and increase commitment to an organisation.

Researchers and practitioners have devoted greater attention to EI and its integration with QM practices in general and TQM in particular [5,9,24]. The EI literature emphasises the design of the work and business units for fuller business involvement and employee motivation. EI also stresses making the employee a stakeholder in business performance through reward systems such as gain sharing and through business education. On the other hand, the QM literature attends more to work process and customer outcomes. TQM promotes excellence through focused and continuous improvements in core business processes, waste reduction efforts, customer satisfaction and timely delivery of goods and services [4].

Despite certain differences exist in EI and TQM, there has been a strong correlation between both practices [5,9,24]. They stress employee participation, training and skill development. According to ISO 8402 [68], the TQM philosophy embraces "all activities through which the needs and expectations of the customer and the community and the objectives of organisation are satisfied in the most efficient and cost effective way by maximising the potential of all employees in a continuing drive for improvement". This underlines that TQM would harness the human and material resources of an organisation to achieve quality improvement. In the EI context, Dale *et al.* [6] argue that:

1. TQM will not function effectively without the total commitment and involvement at all levels of the organisational hierarchy;
2. TQM is all about realising the potential of people;
3. The vast majority of a company's employees are generally keen to contribute to a process of continuous quality improvement;
4. Management needs to design strategies for developing and encouraging involvement;
5. Security, equity, freedom of action/autonomy and democracy are the four principles of humanisation at work;
6. Job enrichment, job enlargement, job rotation and autonomous work groups can all assist involvement of people in the workplace; and
7. Teamwork, flexibility and quality improvement are key involvement ingredient.

Lawler *et al.* [24] contend that organisations with a commitment to EI would also have a commitment to total quality. Fundamental to creating a total involvement environment is the development of corporate vision, the guiding principles and TQM strategies to work toward the vision. The mission statement acts as a compass that gives the organisation a macro-sense of direction and creates alignment. The guiding principles express an organisation's overriding values and beliefs, whereas the TQM strategy is an integrated and sequential milestone that can help track the progress toward improving quality-driven business processes [6].

Some proponents (e.g. [6,62,69]) maintain that there is a universal set of practices. TQM requires firms to coordinate a wide range of behavioral, tacit and intangible resources (particularly, human resources) and its dissemination stands as both a support and a challenge to the new emphasis on firm-specific resources in sustaining organisational performance. QM practices need to be participative by involving employees. EI can provide the foundation for quality efforts and strategy development, and ensure that organisational practices conform to quality requirements followed by everyone in the organisation. Built

into the QM concepts is the notion that employees in an organisation can provide quality services to both internal and external customers [70,71].

In many respects, both EI and TQM programmes are intertwined [5,9]. They contribute to organisational effectiveness in a complementary and reinforcing manner such that their individual impact is weakened by the absence of the other [33,69]. Involvement in TQM terms is a two-way commitment to check ownership and unleash the latent power of individuals. TQM would rely on continuous improvement that is founded in people's commitment and involvement [9,24]. The more the organisations utilised EI capabilities with TQM philosophy, the more positive the results in terms of gaining employee satisfaction, quality of work life, performance outcomes, profitability and competitiveness [5].

8. Conclusion

With the workforce today being better qualified and educated, more aware of the choices open to them for work and career development, and with greater mobility arising out of globalisation, one can expect employees today to be more demanding and, at the same time, willing, able, and ready to take part in workplace improvement, problem solving and decision making. For these reasons, more should be done to leverage EI as a management approach that would lead to the achievement of organisational efficiency and competitive advantage.

Moreover, continuous performance improvements in organisations rely significantly on using workforce's entire capacity and involve employees to generate new ideas and improved ways of working and to make relevant and timely decisions. TQM is concerned with the involvement of people in a more focused way. Labels such as a 'TQM organisation' or a 'quality excellence award winner' or an 'ISO 9000 certified company' also symbolise the organisation's commitment to quality both at the employee level and the organisational level. A high-involvement organisation would nurture an empowering culture and the continuous improvement would not end.

The purpose of this review is to offer a brief overview of the key concepts and approaches underlying EI and QM practices and their integration. In order to examine how EI and QM programmes are contextualised and structured for implementation in the organisational setting, future research would focus on 1) assessing the generalisability of EI/QM concepts and practices, and 2) building the knowledge base necessary for understanding how specific EI/QM mechanisms would be effectively put to work.

Benchmark studies could be undertaken and empirical data be acquired as part of research to uncover and document best practices for organisations to emulate. These are crucial steps towards helping organisational designers establish context and conditions in which EI/QM programmes would be operationalised to achieve organisational performance improvement. The results would be useful as the basis for the development of a framework to facilitate EI/QM implementation and evaluation. The framework would aid researchers in carrying out further studies, and at the same time be of benefit to management practitioners.

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