

Role of Effective Communication in Total Quality Management

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Abstract

Total quality management (TQM) is a management philosophy which focuses on the work process and people, with the major concern for satisfying customers and improving the organizational performance. It involves the proper coordination of work processes which allows for continuous improvement in all business units with the aim of meeting or surpassing customer's expectations. It emphasizes on totality of quality in all facets of an organization with the aim of reducing waste and rework to reduce cost and increase efficiency in production. TQM is applicable to any organization irrespective of size motives, even the public sector organization are fast adopting the ideology in order to make them effective in meeting public demands. It adopts the participative approach which is aim that improving the competitiveness, effectiveness and flexibility of the entire organization. The central concept of TQM has to do with the achievement of quality standard in products and services. This achievement is possible through effective communication anchored on modern communication technology otherwise known as information technology. It is designed to improve the general functioning and process of an organization.

Effective communication is logical, rational and persuasive and it is especially useful in industrial relations, organizational change and relaxation. There is strong relationship between good communication and successful quality implementation. Although communication has always been key requirement of good management, it's even more important in the implementation of total quality management .TQM depends on communication that flows in the all direction up, down and external customers have to know suppliers what they need. Suppliers have to know their customers what they can realistically provide. IBM is a good example of TQM organisation that recognised the importance of communication in its quality attempts.

Key words: Total Quality Management, Communication

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Introduction

Effective communication is the life wire of any organization regardless of its size or nature. If properly used it is an instrument for effective job performance, and serves as an index for employ motivation and the resultant high productivity. There is no doubt too that if systems and organization are to function well, the information one intend to communicate must not only be well developed but is must be well communicated (Handy, 1978)

Industrial relations have perhaps collapsed in a good number of organizations due to absence of effective communication between representative of labour and that of management. This treatise adopts the Total Quality Management (TQM) approach in looking at roles of effective communication in organizational relationships. In an economy suffering from depression such as the type Nigerian workers are going through, effective communication remains a strong factor that bring about hope and reassurance that are increasingly becoming elusive.

Communication

A business can flourish when all objectives of the organization are achieved effectively. For efficiency in an organization, all the people of the organization must be able to convey their message properly. Communication is the activity of conveying information through the exchange of thoughts, messages or information as by speech, visuals, signals, writing or behavior. Emphasis on communication came from human relation approach of management. The human relation writer conceptualized that if worker new what is expected of them, and are aware of the objectives of the organization, and there is regular feedback of their performance, they invariably will be more productive.

Communication is defined as the *exchange of information and understanding* between two or more persons or groups. Note the emphasis on exchange and understanding. Without understanding between sender and receiver concerning the message, there is no communication. All information is encoded, and prior agreement must be reached on the meaning of the code. Quality must be carefully defined and measures agreed upon. Communication downward cannot work because it focuses on what we want to say. Communication should be up & down. Employees should be encouraged to set measurable goals.

Methods of Communication

- **Verbal communication** either between individuals or groups, using direct or indirect methods, such as public address and other broadcasting systems and recordings.
- **Written communication** in the form of notices, bulletins, information sheets, reports, e-mail and recommendations.
- **Visual communication** such as posters, films, video, internet/intranet, exhibitions, demonstrations, displays and other promotional features. Some of these also call for verbal and written communication.

Example, through the way people conduct themselves and adhere to established working codes and procedures, through their effectiveness as communicators and ability to 'sell' good practices.

Communicating the quality message

The people in most organizations fall into one of four 'audience' groups, each with particular general attitudes towards TQM:

1. **Senior managers**, who should see TQM as an opportunity, both for the organization and themselves.
2. **Middle managers**, who may see TQM as another burden without any benefits, and may perceive a vested interest in the status quo.
3. **Supervisors (first line or junior managers)**, who may see TQM as another 'flavour of the period' or campaign, and who may respond by trying to keep heads down so that it will pass over.
4. **Other employees**, who may not care, so long as they still have jobs and get paid, though these people must be the custodians of the delivery of quality to the customer and own that responsibility.

Communicating the quality message

Senior management needs to ensure that each group sees TQM as being beneficial to them. Total quality training material and support (whether internal from a quality director and team or from external consultants) will be of real value only if the employees are motivated to respond positively to them. The implementation strategy must then be based on two mutually supporting aspects:

1. 'Marketing' any TQM initiatives.
2. A positive, logical process of communication designed to motivate people ('discovery', affirmation, participation, and team-based learning). The key medium for motivating the employees and gaining their commitment to quality is face-to-face communication and *visible* management commitment.

Communicating the quality strategy

- The essence of changing attitudes is to gain acceptance for the need to change, and for this to happen it is essential to provide relevant information, convey good practices, and generate interest, ideas and awareness through excellent communication processes.

- This change will require direct and clear communication from the top management to all staff and employees, to explain the need to focus on processes. Everyone will need to know their roles in understanding processes and improving their performance.
- An excellent way to accomplish this first step is to issue a total quality message that clearly states top management's commitment to quality and outlines the role everyone must play.
- This can be in the form of a quality policy or a specific statement about the organization's intention to integrate quality into the business operations.

Example 1: We can become a total quality organization only with your commitment and dedication to improving the processes in which you work. We will help you by putting in place a program of education, training, and teamwork development, based on business and process improvement, to ensure that we move forward together to achieve our business goals.

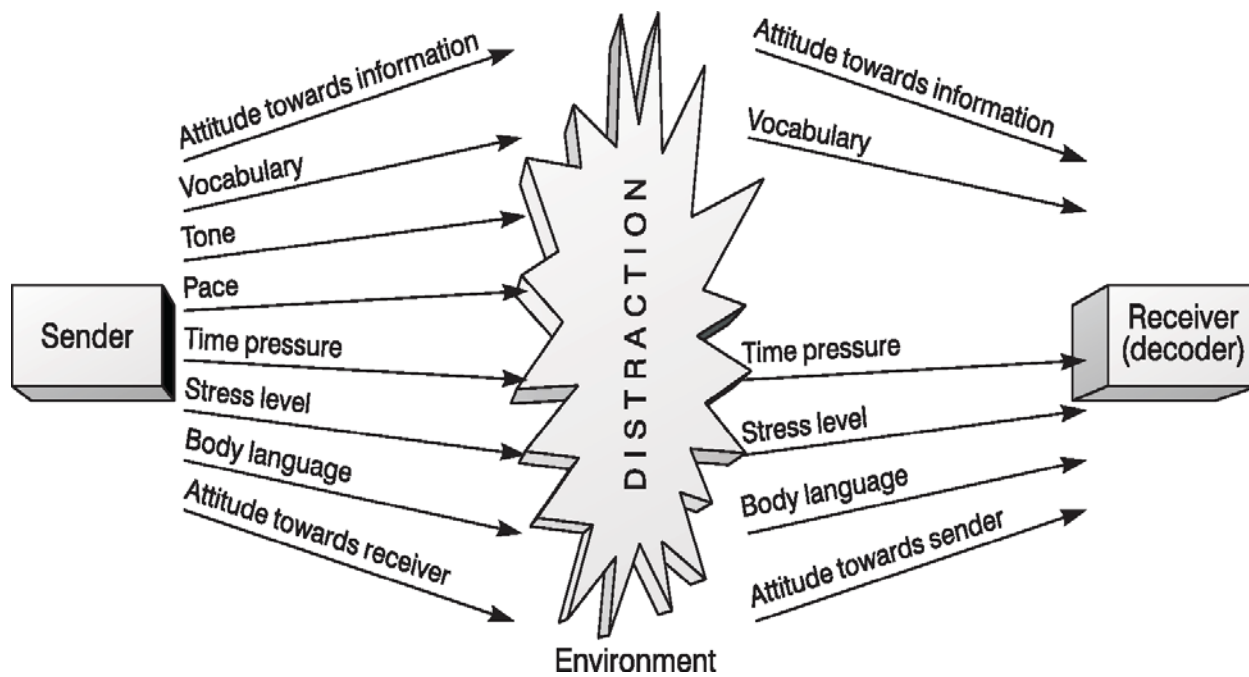
Example 2: We wish to convey to everyone our enthusiasm and personal commitment to the total quality approach, and how much we need your support in our mission of business improvement. We hope that you will become as convinced as we are that business and process improvement is critical for our survival and continued success.

The quality director or TQM coordinator should then assist the senior management team to prepare a directive. This must be signed by all business unit, division, or process leaders, and distributed to everyone in the organization. The directive should include the following:

- Need for improvement.
- Concept for total quality.
- Importance of understanding business processes.
- Approach that will be taken and people's roles.
- Individual and process group responsibilities.
- Principles of process measurement.

Communication Model

This communication model indicates the potential for problems through environmental distractions, mismatches between sender and receiver (or more correctly, decoder) in terms of attitudes – towards the information and each other – vocabulary, time pressures, etc



Effective Communication

Effective communication is an indispensable instrument for organizational success, because without communication one remains isolated and stranded. Effective communication occurs when a desired effect is the result of intentional or unintentional information sharing, which is interpreted between multiple entities and acted on in a desired way. This effect also ensures the message is not distorted during the communication process. Effective communication should generate the desired effect and maintain the effect, with the potential to increase the effect of the message. Therefore, effective communication serves the purpose for which it was planned or designed. Possible purposes might be to elicit change, generate action, create understanding, inform or communicate a certain idea or point of view. When the desired effect is not achieved, factors such as barriers to communication are explored, with the intention being to discover how the communication has been ineffective.

Role of Effective Communication

As a life-wire of an organisation communication attempts to protect and promote the corporate image of an organisation through an effective public relations system. Since communication is an act of transmitting information or a rejoinder can save an organisation a lot of embarrassment. The specific role of communication as a tool for industrial relations with respect to collective bargaining and negotiation is worth mentioning. Here communication takes the persuasive style. In areas of conflict resolutions communication does a wonderful job. There is perhaps no better method of resolving conflicts and conflict situation than through effective communication. One other very important role of effective communication is in the area of change and relocation. It prepares the mind for change such that when

This is the highest level of quality management. It is concerned with the management of quality principle in all the facets of a business including customers and suppliers (Dale et al, 1994, Lockwood

et al, 1996). Total Quality Management (TQM) involves the application of quality management principles to all aspects of the organization, including customers and suppliers, and their integration with the key business processes. It is an approach which involves continuous improvement by

8 everyone in the organisation. TQM is a principle which involves the mutual cooperation of everyone that aids the business process of an organisation and it involves all the stake holders of an organisation. Dale et al, ((a) 1994) cites BS.4778; part 2(1991) where *'TQM is defined as a philosophy embracing all activities through which the needs and expectations of the customer and the community, and the objectives of the organisation are satisfied in most efficient and cost effective way by maximising the potentials of all employees in a continuing drive for improvement.'*

According to Mohammed (2006), TQM is an effective system for integrating the quality development, quality maintenance and quality improvement efforts of various aspects of a system so as to enable services at most economical level and derive full satisfaction. TQM is aimed at the satisfaction of customers needs in an efficient, reliable and profitable way. It involves a radical direction through which an organisation perform her day to day operations in other to ensure that quality is put at the top of mind of every employee and departments in which they operate. Vorley and Tickle (2001), defined TQM as the synthesis of the organisational, technical and cultural elements of a company. They opined that TQM is a heart and mind philosophy which recognises that company culture affects behaviour which in turn affects quality

Oakland (1989), describes TQM as an approach to improve competitiveness efficiently and flexibility for the whole organisation. According to Hellsten and Klefsjö (2000), TQM can be defined as a management system which consist of interdependent unit namely core values, techniques such as process management, benchmarking customer focused planning or improvement teams and tools such as control charts. Dahlgaurd, Kristensen and Kanji (1999) saw TQM as a corporate culture that is characterised by increased customer satisfaction through continuous improvement involving all employees in the organisation. Oakland (1989), noted that 'for an organisation to be truly effective each part of it must work properly together towards the same goal, recognising that each person and each activity affects and in turn is affected by each other – the methods and techniques used in TQM can be applied through out any organisation.'

The Primary Elements of TQM

Total quality management can be summarized as a management system for a customer-focused organization that involves all employees in continual improvement. It uses strategy, data, and effective communications to integrate the quality discipline into the culture and activities of the organization.

- **Customer-focused.** The customer ultimately determines the level of quality. No matter what an organization does to foster quality improvement—training employees, integrating quality into the design process, upgrading computers or software, or buying new measuring tools—the customer determines whether the efforts were worthwhile.
- **Total employee involvement.** All employees participate in working toward common goals. Total employee commitment can only be obtained after fear has been driven from the workplace, when empowerment has occurred, and management has provided the proper environment. High-performance work systems integrate continuous improvement efforts with normal business operations. Self-managed work teams are one form of empowerment.
- **Process-centered.** A fundamental part of TQM is a focus on process thinking. A process is a series of steps that take inputs from suppliers (internal or external) and transforms them into outputs that are delivered to customers (again, either internal or external). The steps required to carry out the process are defined, and performance measures are continuously monitored in order to detect unexpected variation.
- **Integrated system.** Although an organization may consist of many different functional specialties often organized into vertically structured departments, it is the horizontal processes interconnecting these functions that are the focus of TQM.
 - Micro-processes add up to larger processes, and all processes aggregate into the business processes required for defining and implementing strategy. Everyone must understand the vision, mission, and guiding principles as well as the quality policies, objectives, and critical processes of the organization. Business performance must be monitored and communicated continuously.
 - An integrated business system may be modeled after the [Baldrige National Quality Program](#) criteria and/or incorporate the [ISO 9000 standards](#). Every organization has a unique work culture, and it is virtually impossible to achieve excellence in its products and services unless a good quality culture has been fostered. Thus, an integrated system connects business improvement elements in an attempt to continually improve and exceed the expectations of customers, employees, and other stakeholders.
- **Strategic and systematic approach.** A critical part of the management of quality is the strategic and systematic approach to achieving an organization's vision, mission, and goals. This process, called strategic planning or strategic management, includes the formulation of a strategic plan that integrates quality as a core component.

- **Continual improvement.** A major thrust of TQM is continual process improvement. Continual improvement drives an organization to be both analytical and creative in finding ways to become more competitive and more effective at meeting stakeholder expectations.
- **Fact-based decision making.** In order to know how well an organization is performing, data on performance measures are necessary. TQM requires that an organization continually collect and analyze data in order to improve decision making accuracy, achieve consensus, and allow prediction based on past history.
- **Communications.** During times of organizational change, as well as part of day-to-day operation, effective communications plays a large part in maintaining morale and in motivating employees at all levels. Communications involve strategies, method, and timeliness.

These elements are considered so essential to TQM that many organizations define them, in some format, as a set of core values and principles on which the organization is to operate

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