

Chapter 25

Quality Management: An Evolutionary Cross-Cultural Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to address the extent to which quality management is “culture-specific.” The chapter presents the results of a survey administered across 21 countries that seeks to examine quality priorities and practices by adopting the Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness (GLOBE) framework (House et al., 2004). Drawing on previous research (Vecchi & Brennan, 2011), data was collected in 2009 as part of the fifth iteration of the International Manufacturing Strategy Survey (IMSS). The methodology involved the use of a self-administered questionnaire to director/head of operations/manufacturing in best practice firms within the sector of firms classified by ISIC codes (rev.3.1) Divisions 28-35. From this study, it emerges that adopting the GLOBE framework provides an invaluable insight into understanding quality management across countries. While some previous research portrays quality management as a comprehensive management paradigm with elements and relationships that transcend cultural and national boundaries, the current study provides evidence that the adoption of certain quality practices across different countries can follow distinctive patterns.

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990s, many quality models have been widely adopted by firms, such as the Deming Prize in Japan, the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award in the USA, and the European Quality Award in Europe as frameworks for implementing

Total Quality Management (TQM). The widespread assumption is that these are operational frameworks that reproduce TQM by capturing its main constituent parts and replicate its core ideas in a clear and accessible language (Cua et al., 2001). However, TQM is an approach to management embracing both social (“soft TQM”) and techni-

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cal dimensions (“hard TQM”). The social aspect focuses on human resource management and emphasises leadership, teamwork, training, and employee involvement. The technical dimension reflects an orientation toward improving production methods and operations and seeks, through a systematic process, to make possible the constant improvement of goods and services to the customers. The management of these two sets of issues cannot be performed in isolation. Soft and hard TQM should be interrelated and mutually support each other reflecting the holistic character of TQM initiatives (Anwar & Jabnoun, 2006).

The commonly cited problems in the implementation of manufacturing programs are those related to the soft dimension. In particular, cultural resistance to change, lack of training and education (Crawford et al., 1988), lack of coordination of the different departments, and confusion in the relationship between manufacturing subsystems (Safayeni et al., 1991) have been portrayed as being detrimental to the successful implementation of manufacturing programs. These studies provide evidence of the importance of the institution of common practices based on a shared understanding that will facilitate the successful implementation of any TQM initiative. Moreover, according to socio-technical systems theory the joint optimization of practices that are socially and technically oriented should lead to good performance (Emery, 1990). For example, Rehder (1989) argues for the importance of building manufacturing competitiveness upon the integration and coordination of strategy, structure, culture, and human resource subsystems within a complex, changing environment. He shows that the concept of a balanced socio-technical system is reflected in all subsystems of successful Japanese transplants. Given the increasing importance of TQM and the close interrelation between its social and technical dimensions managers need to understand how and what dimensions of national culture influence operation decisions and whether these are likely to change over time.

Previous work on quality management attempts to address the issue of convergence or divergence of quality practices across countries by adopting Hofstede’s national cultural framework. While existing research mainly adopts Hofstede’s dimensions of national culture, GLOBE captures more comprehensively and less ambiguously the elements of national culture. Drawing on our previous work (Vecchi & Brenan, 2011) this paper thus examines quality management by using GLOBE’s nine cultural dimensions (House et al., 2004). The purpose of this study is to address the extent to which quality management is “culture-specific” from an evolutionary perspective (Zbaracki, 1998; Ravichandram, 2000).

To this end, we explore the extent to which the different dimensions of national culture influence quality management over time in a global context. Specifically, we consider whether over a timeframe of three years (2006–2009) there is a difference in quality priorities and practices across national cultures followed by a consideration of the managerial implications of the results of our study. The chapter is organised as follows. In Section 2, we provide an overview of the literature of quality management from an evolutionary cross-cultural perspective. In Section 3, we explain national culture and explore its relationship to TQM by contextualising several hypotheses. In Section 4, the methodology is described, while in Section 5 we present the data analysis and the main findings. The final section presents the main conclusions of this study and the managerial implications arising from the findings.

QUALITY MANAGEMENT RESEARCH FROM AN EVOLUTIONARY CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

A significant strand of the literature seeks to assess the diversity of quality practices amongst countries. The increased complexity of today’s

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