

Proliferation of Quality Initiatives

Purpose

This paper outlines the current plethora of quality related initiatives in order to enable people to develop integrated and educated Quality strategies and plans for their organisations. It aims to show how the framework of the European Quality Award can be used to show the relative strengths of initiatives and how they may compliment each other.

Pressures

Organisations are currently being subjected to two apparently contradictory pressures. On one hand they have to become more flexible and responsive to deal with unprecedented change. On the other, they are being subjected to greater and greater regulation and control. These pressures require differing managerial responses.

When faced with rapid change the only response is to make the organisation more flexible, by encouraging all staff to innovate. This requires an empowering style of management in which the manager plays the role of enabler or facilitator rather than controller. In this way all the people within the organisation are encouraged to continually improve what they do.

It is not only technology that is changing rapidly. Political, economic and social conditions are changing just as rapidly in some cases. Successful organisations will understand and anticipate these changes, finding opportunities in the apparent chaos. The difference between success and failure will depend on the quality of the people and their ability to learn and adapt.

Proliferation

In this environment, of ever increasing turbulence, there have been strong pressures to use initiatives to try to assure quality. Unfortunately some of the most important factors for a successful organisation are impossible to measure and audit. However this has not stopped the drive for standardisation and particularly 'third party' audit.

BS EN ISO 9000 is an attempt to reduce worldwide proliferation of quality management standards. It has not yet been successful, perhaps because it is too narrow in its focus or because the task is impossible.

Initiatives have started to come from non-traditional sources, particularly Government and quangos. As concern for global competitiveness has risen Governments have looked at ways of stimulating improvement. Sometimes this has been done in a fragmented and confused way.

The Investor in People standard was developed by the Department of Employment, using the expertise of the UK's most successful businesses. The Citizen's Charter, a favourite with the Prime Minister, is driven by a political agenda. The DTI funded the UK Quality Award to the tune of £0.5 million. With privatisation and the creation of the "OF....." series of watchdogs, proprietary schemes have emerged like the OFSTED inspection framework for schools. Newly created quangos, like Training and Enterprise Councils, in their zealotry to achieve their visions, have created more initiatives. Confused? You should be.

Principles

There is no such thing as valueless human behaviour. In a similar way no action within an organisation can be divorced from the values and principles of the people deciding upon the action. It is fashionable to be considered a result driven person. However results can only be achieved by implementing methods and these methods will embrace certain principles. There are well documented and tested principles of Quality. It is essential to understand these before initiatives are selected because some initiatives conflict with the basic principles. Some embrace them more strongly than others.

The most holistic set of principles for Quality is Dr Deming's 14 points or principles [1]. Dr Deming also identified the "Deadly Diseases" which prevent true transformation. How well the initiative is in harmony with the organisation's principles is very important. If there is little parity, or even conflict, the initiative should not be adopted. Of course, in the many cases where initiatives are mandated, the organisation has little option and can only try to influence the body with responsibility for the initiative.

Consider two examples. Firstly it is "deadly" to rely on visible figures alone. Some of the most important information for management is unknown or unknowable. The Citizen's Charter is based heavily on the achievement of targets. Most of these are easy to measure rather than critical to the citizen. The Charter concept is founded on penalties for failure and competition with other providers of service. In this climate there are a great many temptations to tamper with the figures. Anyone who has held a managerial position knows how operational definitions can be manipulated and even worse, processes can be manipulated to the detriment of the customer, in order to achieve often-arbitrary targets. The use of figures is not wrong, the principles underpinning their use are flawed. The Citizen's Charter also contradicts Point 8, Drive out Fear. One needs to treat this initiative with great caution.

In contrast to this, Investor in People is in harmony with many of the principles of modern quality philosophy. It helps build constancy of purpose, encourages education and self-improvement and improves the quality of leadership. But it too can go adrift if guiding principles are ignored. Thankfully Investors does not

require performance related pay, an approach often fundamentally flawed because of a lack of understanding of processes and the nature of variation. The very principle of external inspection can be flawed. This can be used to drive in fear. Dependence on monitoring and inspection does not improve quality. Quality has to be built into the process and sound statistical methods used to achieve process control and improvement. The emergence of self-assessment, with some external validation, is a welcome development.

In conclusion, it is very important for the principles of an organisation to be articulated, agreed and protected [2].

Some of the more Common Quality Related Initiatives

Brainstorms regularly identify many quality related initiatives influencing, or with the potential to influence organisations. These lists have been distilled to the more common ones detailed in this paper. Others are emerging or are proprietary to specific industry sectors. They should be analysed in a similar way if they are relevant to the particular organisation.

Investor in People

Purpose: To help organisations improve performance through a planned approach to setting and communicating goals and developing people to meet these goals.

Scope: There are four main elements to the standard. An Investor in People makes a public commitment from the top to develop all employees to achieve its strategic objectives. An Investors organisation regularly reviews the training and development needs of all employees. It also takes action to train and develop individuals on recruitment and throughout their employment. Finally, an Investor in People evaluates the investment in training and development to assess achievement and improve future effectiveness.

Benefits

Benefits to the organisation: What people can do, and are motivated to do, aligns with what the organisation needs them to do. Staff motivation, morale and skill is improved which should lead to improvements in the service delivered, with reductions in costs.

Benefits to the individual: Individual training and development needs are identified, satisfied and evaluated. Involvement of staff is raised and communication is improved. People understand more clearly how they contribute to the success of the whole organisation, improving morale, giving a greater sense of purpose and reducing stress.

Method: Assessment to the national standard is co-ordinated by Training and Enterprise Councils. The first stage is to gain initial senior management commitment to the standard. This will enable the organisation to conduct a self-assessment or health check with its staff. There are proformas to assist this stage. Depending on the results of the self-assessment an action plan will be prepared to fill any gaps. This will be submitted with a public statement of commitment by the most senior executive to the Training and Enterprise Council. At this stage the organisation is officially committed to the standard. The action plan will be completed and the organisation will prepare a portfolio of evidence. When ready the organisation applies to the TEC for assessment and the portfolio is submitted.

The assessor reviews the portfolio based on the assessment indicators. Assuming this is okay a site visit will be conducted to gain proof. Assuming this stage is successful the organisation will be submitted to the TEC Recognition Panel for final validation. After this the award is presented and the organisation can refer to itself as an Investor in People. The TEC reassesses the organisation at least every three years.

Sources: Training and Enterprise Councils.

National Vocational Qualifications

Purpose: To improve the performance of individuals within an organisation in order to improve the quality of their work.

Scope: NVQs are based on National Standards, which describe the expected performance of an individual in a work role. They focus on the required competencies to achieve the task. Currently 86% of occupational areas is covered by NVQs. There are five levels; level 1 for foundation and basic activities, level 2 for a broad range of skills and responsibilities, level 3 for complex / skilled and / or supervisory work, level 4 for managerial / specialist and level 5 for professional / senior management. Management Charter Initiative NVQs (levels 3 -5) are considered separately.

Benefits: NVQs allow for flexibility of learning approaches. They can be achieved by credit accumulation on a unit basis. There can be accreditation of prior learning allowing for recognition of existing competencies. The method of assessment is flexible in terms of time, place and location. Assessment is continual. NVQs are developing national recognition and currency. They provide employers with a standard means of assessing competence.

Method: The competencies are defined by employers through the lead body for the NVQ. Assessment can only be carried out through recognised assessment centres or in-house assessors trained by these centres. Smaller organisations will have to rely on the assessment centres or network to share assessors. After the relevant NVQ has been identified there is an initial consultation at the assessment centre. The elements of competence are reviewed and the way in which evidence will be collected is determined. Any top up training is identified and completed. There are three forms of evidence; performance evidence collected from workplace observation, evidence from prior achievements and supplementary evidence such as questioning. If the assessment in the workplace is successful and the portfolio of evidence is adequate then the person will be awarded their NVQ.

Sources: Training & Enterprise Councils and Local NVQ Assessment Centres.

Management Charter Initiative

Purpose: To improve the performance of UK organisations by improving the quality of UK managers.

Scope: The structure of the management standards covers management of operation, of finance, of people, of information and of quality. They apply to all levels of management from supervisory to senior management, and lead to NVQ's from levels 3 to 5.

Benefits

Benefits to the organisation: Individual Development is aligned to meeting strategic objectives. Management Development is achieved on the job and is competence focused. MCI provide a complete framework for managing organisations.

Benefits to Individuals: Comprehensive checklist for identifying development needs helps clarify the individual's role, and the role of others, leads to greater confidence and a more effective management style. Through crediting competence, recognition can be gained for existing competence, leading to a qualification.

Method: The MCI is the lead body for management standards and provides a network of licensed centres, which accredit the standard. Managers taking part in the MCI firstly gain advice and understanding on the level of standard that they are attaining. They then collect evidence of competence. Each element of competence is assessed by the achievement of performance criteria and range indicators. Elements of competence form units of competence, which in turn are parts of the key role of the manager. This information is collated into a portfolio, which is assessed in an interview. If the interview is successful accreditation is recommended and a National Vocational Qualification is achieved. If unsuccessful then feedback is given, and further on the job development takes place, leading to resubmission of the portfolio once these competence are achieved.

Sources: Training and Enterprise Councils or Management Charter Initiative, London.

BS EN ISO9000

Purpose: To introduce disciplines, procedures and systems to assure that the production of goods or services meet the customers' requirements.

Scope: Shows how to establish, document and maintain a quality system. Part 1 covers design, development, production, installation and servicing. Part 2 covers production and installation and part 3 covers final inspection and test.

Benefits: The organisation achieves an internationally recognised standard, which shows that they operate their processes as stated in their manuals and procedures. This ensures consistency, traceability and common approaches for non-conformity. Organisations often use third party assessments to reduce the costs of assessing suppliers themselves. In many industrial markets accreditation to ISO9000 is necessary for consideration as a supplier. Hence it has become mandatory. The standard should help to improve efficiency.

Method: Decide on which part is relevant to the organisation. Establish an appropriate interpretation. Gain senior management support and produce an action plan to meet the 20 clauses contained in the standard. Appoint resources to implement the plan. External consultancy support may be necessary. Train staff and support them in documenting their systems. Implement the complete system and check. Arrange assessment by a certification body. This organisation conducts an audit and raises non-compliances if identified. Certification is possible once these are cleared.

Sources: British Standards Institute, British Quality Foundation and Business Links.

Citizen's Charter

Purpose: To ensure that citizen's receive high-quality services, responsive to their needs, provide efficiently at a reasonable cost. Charters exist for Parents, Students, Patients, Travellers, etc.

Scope: The Citizen's Charter applies to all public services and to some quangos. All the Charters are based on seven principles; explicit, prominent *standards*, *openness* about how the service is run and how they perform, full, accurate *information* including targets, *choice* of service, *non-discrimination*, *accessibility* of services for customers and clear *complaints* processes.

Benefits: Unlike other quality initiatives the Citizen's Charter is strongly based on overt political beliefs and strategy. It integrates many of the Conservative Party's recent policies and cannot be considered on its own. Its strength is in clearly focusing on customers and their wants and needs and in improving service. Whilst the aspirations are sound the methods embraced can conflict with the modern principles of Quality Management. For example achievement of the standards is based on competition, targets with penalties, performance-related pay, inspection and testing. Evidence exists that these approaches can be very harmful to continual improvement. However the Citizen's Charter is supported with legislation so, like when BS EN ISO9000 is mandated, it cannot be ignored. The Government has made a commitment to continually improve the Citizen's Charter and there is evidence that enhancements are addressing some of the concerns already mentioned.

Method: Implementation of the principles of the Charter is supposed to be flexible. If the organisation believes it is excelling to the requirements it can apply for a Chartermark which is an award in recognition of progress. For example, in schools the emphasis on standards is evidenced by the National Curriculum and OFSTED inspections. New governing arrangements, league tables, exam and truancy results are to improve openness and information. Choice is improved by GMS / LMS options and ultimately by the routes for choosing and changing school. Failure to comply with the minimum requirements carries legal and financial penalties.

Sources: Government Departments and HMSO bookshops.

Other Developments

There are many other initiatives, which have been excluded from this paper in the interests of brevity. Some are common to all organisations, others are proprietary. Other quality related issues are emerging and will grow in importance on the quality agenda.

Health and safety continues to be integrated into the business agenda.

Environmental issues will grow in importance with increasing consumer concern and direct action. BS7750, the British Standard covering Environmental Management Systems, is already established and employer interest will increase, particularly with the development of its international equivalent, ISO14000.

Business Process Reengineering fits neatly into the framework, focusing on dramatic improvements in performance. Great care has to be taken with the principles underpinning this approach. If it is to be used to create fear and return to autocratic management, then it will undermine the gains made by other initiatives. However, it can be a useful part of an overall approach.

One issue, which will grow in importance, is Equality of Opportunity. Societies cannot continue to exclude so many people from opportunities to participate and contribute. Already the more enlightened employers are realising the economic benefits of customer and staff diversity. Western Training and Enterprise Council and many partners, such as the CRE, the voluntary sector and businesses, have developed the Equal Opportunities Quality Framework. This is based on the European Quality Award Framework and enables employers to assess their progress towards a truly inclusive organisation. It has been successfully piloted and is due to be launched in September 1995.

Of great concern is the rapid growth in proprietary approaches to quality. This particularly affects the public sector and quangos. Civil Servants should be extremely cautious in designing non-standard approaches to quality assurance and improvement. This leads to confusion and fragmentation. A lot of energy is being spent trying to integrate and explain proprietary initiatives.

Training and Enterprise Councils, for example, have had many control mechanisms imposed. The answer to any problem seems to be to introduce yet another control mechanism, hence making improvement even less likely. At present TECs are expected to conform to TQA:SM (TEED Quality Assurance Supplier Management), achieve Investor in People status, meet legions of financial controls and targets, and now satisfy extensive Licensing criteria. One TEC submission for a License weighed over 10 stone! Bureaucrats like quality assurance systems because they give the appearance of quality and protect jobs for auditors. Dependence on inspection does not improve quality.

Framework

In order to resolve the confusion concerning the plethora of initiatives a framework, or big picture, is required. This can be used to show how the initiatives compliment or conflict with each other, along with their relative strengths. After evaluating many different models, the author has concluded that the framework developed for the European Quality Award is the most holistic and flexible. It is likely to become a de-facto standard of best practice throughout Europe.

The premise behind the EQA Framework is that customer satisfaction, people satisfaction and a positive impact on society are achieved through leadership driving policy and strategy, people management, resources and processes, leading ultimately to excellence in business or organisational results. The framework is divided into the five enablers and the four results. Figure 1 shows the nine-block model. This can be used to integrate the initiatives.

Integration

It is necessary to evaluate how each initiative impacts each of the five enabling criteria; Leadership, Policy and Strategy, People Management, Resources and Processes and the four results criteria; Customer Satisfaction, People Satisfaction, Impact on Society and Business Results.

This is done using matrices or tables. It is best to analyse against each criterion's parts and then average for the criterion as a whole. For example table 1 shows how some of the more common quality initiatives impact the individual parts of the processes criterion. If there is no believed impact by the initiative on the part, the field is left blank. If there is an impact, this is assessed as weak, medium or strong. There is a degree of subjectivity so the people making the assessment must do it from solid knowledge of the EQA and the initiatives being considered.

Once one initiative has been completed the next one can be considered. Now one has to assess between the initiatives as well. It may be necessary to reassess early initiatives in the light of later assessments. Eventually the matrix is complete. By allocating 3 points for strong, 2 for medium and 1 for weak the average scores for each initiative can be calculated and the overall impact assessed. The impacts can then be summarised in a final matrix (see table 2).

It must be stressed that the assessments in tables 1 and 2 reflect the author's knowledge, experience and opinions. It is recommended that individuals within organisations produce their own matrices incorporating proprietary initiatives. This ensures deeper learning and greater relevance.

Benefits

Integrating initiatives using the EQA Framework assists in developing implementation plans, in line with the organisation's vision and principles. Understanding how initiatives fit and complement each other assists the organisation in achieving constancy of purpose. Through clear communication people will understand how initiatives align with the longer-term objectives. This should reduce the risk of initiative overload. By carefully understanding initiatives the organisation can move towards the desired culture and underpinning principles.

Initiatives can be prioritised using the matrices. If in the early stages of a quality journey an organisation wants to improve leadership commitment initiatives like Investors and MCI might be more beneficial than BS EN ISO9000. Many of these initiatives are not mutually exclusive and the organisation may develop an implementation plan with complementary initiatives phased over time. A manufacturer whose main client requires BS EN ISO9000 might make this the initial priority, with the aim to move onto Investors once accreditation is achieved. By thinking ahead, areas of overlap or tension between the approaches can be tackled and staff will understand the priorities. Using common tools and principles will assist throughout.

In less "Greenfield" situations organisations may wish to use the EQA Framework to conduct self-assessment and possibly benchmarking. In this way they can identify the progress made and the areas for improvement. The matrices may help identify the initiatives, which are most likely to impact on the shortfalls. For example if self-assessment highlights weaknesses in Policy and Strategy and People Management then Investors might be an obvious choice.

Conclusion

There is a great deal of confusion concerning quality-related initiatives. Proliferation looks likely to increase with initiatives coming from less traditional sources. It is essential for organisations to understand how these initiatives align with their vision and principles and what benefits they will bring.

Using the EQA Framework to integrate these initiatives provides a useful tool for developing Quality strategy and plans. It ensures a holistic approach is adopted, in line with best practice.

References

- [1] Deming, W. E., Out of the Crisis, Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- [2] Covey, S. R., Principles Centred Leadership, Summit, 1991.

Biography

John Marsh has many years' experience of implementing Total Quality in business, government, education and, more recently, with whole communities. Whilst based in the UK he regularly works in the US. He has written two books, many papers, and co-authored several British and International Standards.

Figure 1 : The European Quality Award Framework

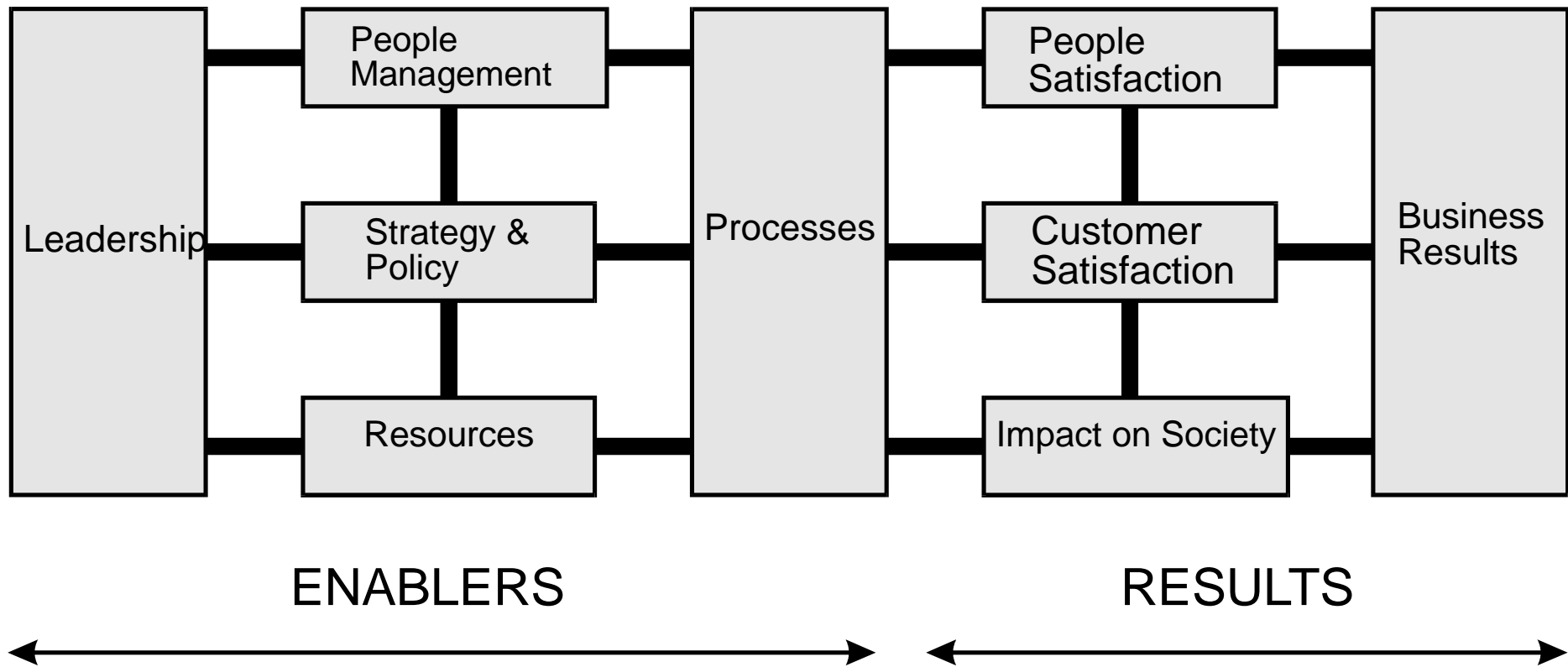


Table 1 : Matrix showing the impact of each Quality Initiative on the parts of the EQA Criterion Processes

Processes Criterion Parts		Common Quality Initiatives		Investor in People	National Vocational Qualifications exc MCI	Management Charter Initiative NVQs	BS EN ISO 9000	Citizen's Charter
Processes	5a How processes critical to the success of the organisation are identified.			Weak		Weak		
	5b How the organisation systematically manages its processes.				Medium	Weak	Strong	Weak
	5c How process performance measurements, along with relevant feedback, are used to review processes and to set targets for improvement.			Weak	Weak	Medium	Medium	Medium
	5d How the organisation stimulates innovation and creativity in process improvement.			Strong	Medium	Medium	Weak	
	5e How the organisation implements process changes and evaluates benefits.			Medium			Medium	
Average for Criterion				Weak	Weak	Weak	Medium	Weak

Table 2 : Matrix showing the impact of each Quality Initiative on the European Quality Award Criteria

EQA Criteria		Common Quality Initiatives				
		Investor in People	National Vocational Qualifications exc MCI	Management Charter Initiative NVQs	BS EN ISO 9000	Citizen's Charter
Enablers	Leadership	Medium	Weak	Medium	Weak	
	Policy and Strategy	Strong	Weak	Medium	Weak	
	People Management	Strong	Medium	Medium	Weak	
	Resources	Weak	Medium	Medium	Weak	
	Processes	Weak	Weak	Weak	Medium	Weak
Results	Customer Satisfaction	Medium	Medium	Medium	Weak	Medium
	People Satisfaction	Strong	Medium	Medium		Weak
	Impact on Society	Weak				
	Business Results	Medium	Weak	Medium	Weak	Medium