

Total quality management (TQM) for Professional success

BY T.M. JAYASEKERA, B.Sc., MBA,
MICE, C Eng., FIE, FIM, FCIWEM
(Lond.), Project Director - CARE
International

An excerpt of the paper presented at the
Association of Secretaries and Administra-
tive Professionals in Asia Pacific on 19-09-
2000 at the Hotel Hilton International

Very simply, Total Quality Management (TQM) is a Change Agent. It is deciding on what is to be done & how it should be done to achieve success.

In general, the environment, in which we live and work, is uncertain. It is often remarked that the only sure things in our life are death and taxes. Even though this is a gloomy prospect it captures a key theme in modern life. I am not a prophet of doom or gloom. We are faced with a great deal of uncertainty.

This does not mean that we should throw up our hands in dismay and stop trying to get things accomplished. We need to understand that uncertainty is relative. Therefore the Management's challenge is to determine the degree of uncertainty and act accordingly. Concrete plans may be done for the areas of high certainty. Areas marked by low certainty require flexible plans that can be adjusted to suit changing conditions.

TQM

Quality means different things to different people. It is difficult to give a perfect definition to Quality as it is in the mind of the customer. Therefore it is something to do with continually satisfying customer requirements.

Quality does not mean luxury. It is delighting the customer by continually meeting & improving upon agreed requirements.

Total means that everyone in the organization is involved in the final product or service to the customer.

Management is a process, which involves people systems & supporting Tools & Techniques. Total Quality Management - TQM is therefore a change agent, which is aimed at providing a customer driven organization.

The management of quality is now a key issue for all organizations in both the public & private sectors. It involves every one from the chief executive to the lowest level worker. There are so many experts on this subject today & most of them have made it look very sophisticated & confusing.

In reality it is the application of common sense rather than a complex academic subject. My aim is to "clear the fog" & provide an easy step by step guide to understand the TQM process very clearly & very easily so that every one can gain from it.

By this, I hope to share my knowledge & experience with you to bring you the success you are looking for! I hope to provide you the needed guidance & wish you all the best.

Who is a professional

Although there is no universally accepted list of criteria for professional status a number of general characteristics have been suggested by various authors. Among those the typically mentioned ones are:

Formal education in a specialized body of knowledge
Unselfish service Motive
Controlled entry
Universal ethical code
Sanctioning organization
A professional can easily be identified from the above criteria

Who is a professional secretary?

According to the Dartnell Professional Secretary's Hand book A professional Secretary is a secretary strictly controlled by the attitudes & the abilities of the individual holding the position of a secretary/steno.

The International Secretaries Association identifies a Secretary as an executive assistant who possess mastery of skills who demonstrates the ability to assume responsibility without direct supervision who exercises initiative & judgement & who makes decisions within the scope of assigned authority.

Among several different roles played by a secretary the major ones include assuming responsibility, Getting work done, pleasing boss, carrying out specific tasks.

Gap between how it is supposed to be (the specifications) and the intended product or service is due mainly to fortresses created by you within the system, poor communication, and lack of teamwork and lack of capability. This can be overcome by way of teamwork and improving inter personal skills such as communication knowledge etc. Never be the weak link in the process chain.

A secretary's job like that of any other job has a Task component & a responsibility component. The task component covers, among other things the activities he/she performs with respect to assigned duties & the responsibility involves handling work efficiently & effectively, loyalty, confidentiality, pleasing character, tactfulness, decision making, adaptability etc.

Therefore the success depends entirely on how well she performs her role as a professional secretary.

Who is your Customer?

This is the most important aspect of your work - ie identifying the customer

Your internal customer is none other than your boss. Your external customer is none other than your boss's customer, as you will have to attend to his matters in the absence of the boss. So! You are a very important person! Aren't you? - But, Remember! Your customer should be even more important.

What is meant by success of a professional secretary

Success according to Oxford English Dictionary is the accomplishment of an aim or attainment of wealth fame or position. As a Professional Secretary, one should be in a position to achieve the ends and attain position or fame by working according to the tasks mentioned above and carrying out the responsibilities in a manner accepted to a professional Secretary is identified in the professional guidelines above mentioned. This is not at all easy. TQM will be a useful guide to attain success.

Implementation of TQM

TQM is a change agent, which aims to provide a customer driven organization. It provides new management methods, removes departmental fortresses, recognize new process chains in the operation and above all changes the behaviour of individuals. The benefits of TQM are many. The process of obtaining benefits is logical and easy to understand. It works like this.

By being customer focused and customer oriented, whether internal or external, you "delight" the customer, by providing services that will exceed the expectations of the customer by doing things right first time and every time and thereby reducing the cost of the services provided as the rework and waste will be less with fewer mistakes, fewer delays/snags and with better use of time and materials.

This will improve the productivity of yourself that will lead to improving the productivity of the organization you are working for. Owing to this you as well as the organization would be in a position to capture the market with better quality and lower price that will provide the competitiveness and the effectiveness.

For you, this will provide success in your

carrier, which will provide career progress, and for the organization it will mean staying in business with continuous improvement and growth. This will mean that there will be more and more improvement and satisfaction for you and more and more satisfaction to the countrymen by way of more and more jobs and creation of wealth to the society at large.

Very simply, TQM is knowing the recipient of your service - The Customer - ie. The internal customer as the immediate recipient and the external customer as the ultimate recipient of the service, Be it a individual, team or an organization, agree with him or what he or she really wants and delight him by exceeding the requirements agreed upon and to carry this out on a continuous basis with continuous improvement. Meeting agreed upon requirements is not at all easy. This is what everyone is worried about.

"Quality" exists in the mind of the customer. It is not easy to read the minds of others. Therefore it is not easy to provide quality. Providing total quality is not easy. It will require lot of effort as there are so many gaps that can be identified such as,

Gap between what the customer expects and what he gets

Gap between what he gets and the promoted image of the product or service

Gap between what he gets and how it is supposed to be (the specifications)

Gap between how it is supposed to be (the specifications) and the intended product or service

The gap between what the customer expects and the intended product or service

As a professional, If you can identify and overcome these gaps that means you are a Total Quality professional engaged in TQM.

How to overcome these gaps

The gap between what he customer wants and the intended product or service of how you want it to be is mainly due to misunderstanding or non-agreement with the customer.

Simply, you have not been able to understand the customer.

It can be overcome by knowing your customer well, listening to him and agreeing on the requirements with them.

Never assume that you know what your customer wants. Improve the capability of yourself as well as that of the system.

Gap between how it is supposed to be (the specifications) and the intended product or service is due mainly to fortresses created by you within the system, poor communication, and lack of teamwork and lack of capability. This can be overcome by way of teamwork and improving inter personal skills such as communication knowledge etc. Never be the weak link in the process chain.

Gap between what it actually is and how it is supposed to be (the specifications) is mainly due to poor quality and poor management. This can be overcome by Understanding what is required of you making sure you have the required things to do the job paying careful attention to what you do and applying process controls.

Gap between what it actually is and how it is promoted is mainly due to poor management, values ethics etc.

This could be overcome by following ethical behaviours improving communication and applying total quality philosophy.

Finally, the gap between how it actually is and what is wanted by the customer is the multiplication effect of the other gaps earlier mentioned. This could be overcome by customer orientation and continuous improvement.

Quality improvement process

Quality improvement is a continuous process.

This is a continuous process having followed key elements

- Understand customer requirements
- Meet customer requirements
- Measure the success
- Keep improving

We have the opportunity to do this easily. You can achieve this by following the under-mentioned process carefully. The process has six steps. They are,

- Do right things
- Do it right first time
- Do it right every time
- Communicate
- Train
- Improve

TQM is a process, which originates from you. It involves communication training and continuous improvement involvement is the key element in this process.

An important question that comes to my mind is why are we craving for Total Quality. Most organizations are dependent on both

their customers and shareholders. Survival and Growth of an organization depends on continuing to meet their needs. This is becoming increasingly challenging in to-Day's climate of rising customer expectations, increasing competition and increasing penalties for failure.

The process of TQM is very simple IT consists of following steps.

- Understand what is meant by TQM
- Recognize the need to change
- Plan the change
- Provide the environment
- Provide the process
- Support the process
- Ensure success

Total Quality Management is a common sense approach and it is a very simple approach. There are no complications. Complications are created by people who have not very clearly understood it. TQM provides success. It is "sure fire" solution to most of your problems as a professional. Only thing that you should remember is to know it well and apply it with total commitment.

The writer is a well-known management consultant in Sri Lanka and abroad. He is also a Chartered Engineer by Profession.

Business Reach