

The Strategy of a Permanent Improvement of Quality – an Important Task of the Enterprise Management

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Abstract: During the last two decades we have been witnessing an important revolution in what quality is concerned. Successful organizations have realised that a permanent improvement is necessary in order to stay into business. Thus, they have developed some mechanisms capable to help them with transforming themselves and with adapting themselves to new requirements. Nowadays, quality is considered a strategic element of the enterprise management, having an important role in the increase of the competitiveness of products and services both at a domestic and an international scale. At present, worldwide, both producers and consumers ask for guarantees that might prove the quality of the products and services. It is no longer sufficient to offer products and services which have certain standards, but producers have to demonstrate their capacity to assure a permanent quality for their products and services. In order to maintain a high level of quality it is always necessary to continuously improve the existing products and services, and this action means effort. A new philosophy should be adopted, leaving apart the "acceptable level" of quality. Maintaining and improving the quality within an organization is a long and continuous process to which the whole team should bring its contribution. Obviously, the quality manager and the executive manager of the organization play a very important role within this process, but they could not achieve everything. It is always necessary that every employee should become aware, in the first place, that the new system of management makes his/her life easier, and secondly, that he/she is expected to make his/her own contribution in order to help the system to get the expected results, getting thus greater advantages for himself/herself.

Managers at any level should work together with employees in order to accomplish the objectives. Non-formal communication within the organization may assure the management efficiency within the process of improving quality. The enterprise should assure every employee the necessary instruments for the development of all the activities, an optimized secured information system, and a permanent improvement of the existing products and services, based on a business planning, in order to become attractive for the market and "to stay into business".

The success in the configuration of a quality system is directly dependent upon the specifics of the organizational culture, of the pre-existing cultural elements, of the flexibility of the organizational culture which might bring forth and insert new values and norms, specifically linked to quality. The strategy in the field of quality assures the putting into practice of certain directions regarding the future performances of the firm, of certain possibilities for building up and exploiting some advantages linked to competitiveness and determining certain behaviour procedures within different markets.

In the specialty literature, quality is defined as a distinctive characteristic of a product, a process or a system, or as an essential property, essential in order to characterise an entity.

The concept of quality grew along time. Until the industrial revolution, the craftsman was responsible for the quality of a product. At the same time, with the outburst of the industrial revolution and with the growth of production in the factories, quality is taken in charge of by the workshop chief or supervisors.

Among the functions of the management and quality insurance, the improvement of quality has a master role in diminishing the costs. The notion of quality improvement has the significance of an assembly of actions made by the whole organisation in order to increase the efficiency of the activities and processes, in order to have more advantages both for the organisation and for its clients.

The application of the "continuous improvement" principle leads to the following actions: its growth and development, using periodic assessments for the established excellence criteria, allows the identification of potential improvement areas, the continuous improvement of efficiency of all processes, promotes the prevention based on activities and training each member of the company, offering an adequate education as far as the continuous improvement methods and tools are concerned.

In order to create a proper atmosphere for quality improvement, one must take into consideration:

- a. Encouraging and supporting a leading style which supports the action;
- b. Promoting values, attitudes and behaviours which stimulate quality improvement;
- c. Establishing some clear quality improvement objectives;
- d. Encouraging efficient communication and team work;
- e. Acknowledgement of successes and achievements;
- f. Education and training for quality improvement.

Here are the steps to be followed in order to improve quality:

- to prove the necessity of improvement by emphasizing the possible benefits due to applying an improvement programme;
- to identify the improvement proposals and to select the ideas according to the specific advantages which they can bring, expressed both in financial savings and in technological terms;
- to organize the work teams for each project of quality improvement;
- to find out the causes of production and manufacturing shortcomings and so on;
- to establish the necessary remedies to erase the shortcoming causes and to justify the efficiency of applying such remedies;
- to apply the improvement options and to control the new work procedures aiming to continue the benefits achieved even in the future.

The advantages of applying such a principle include:

a. For policy and strategy utterance: to create and make a more competitive business plan by integrating the continuous improvement in the business planning strategy;

b. For objective establishment: a realistic establishment, improvement objective change and the providing of their necessary resources;

c. For an operational management: to implicate the employers of the company in a continuous improvement of the processes and products;

d. For the human resources management: to supply tools and opportunities for all the employers of the company and to stimulate products, processes and system improvement.

Quality permanent improvement must be a main concern of the companies in order to survive in a competitive environment. Achieving a culture in the field is essential for quality improvement, for new methods and technologies, among which we mention, first of all, Total Quality Management (TQM). Quality specialists established that it is not the technology that is the key to continuous quality improvement, but the management is the one to be concerned with the change and an adequate cultural formation to the specificity

of the organisation, in order to achieve lasting performances. A quality improvement project usually starts with the identification of an improvement possibility. This identification may be based on:

a. measurements of the loss due to quality, caused by not valuing the resource potential in processes and activities;

b. assessing the process performances inside the organisation by comparing them with similar processes of outstanding leaders, aiming to emphasize the ways of quality improvement. This performance assessment compared to the best companies (leaders) in that field is called the Benchmarking process.

Since they were identified, the quality improvement projects or activities go along by taking some steps and end by applying a preventive or correctional action of the process, aiming to obtain and maintain a new and improved achievement level.

Identifying the processes with improvable efficiency can be done by means of actions such as:

- processes' control and the measurement of their achievement;
- process analysis;
- non-conformity identification of the process necessities, flaws, dysfunctions and so on;
- non-conforming cause investigation;
- staff and clients' contentment measurement by inner satisfaction indicators (quality loss reduction, and so on).

Organisation management must be aware that the employees need to change their view on quality, to become aware of the fact that perfection is not impossible. The manager starts with the main objectives of quality policy, which he conceives and further transmits to all the employees. Quality policy must take into account the capacity of the competitors, aiming to establish responsibilities for the departments directly or indirectly concerning the quality.

Total quality application in an organisation cannot be achieved but by a change of mentality, of the whole staff's attitude, starting with the General Manager.

These changes are possible only after a cultural transformation of the people in the company into a quality culture. Organizations having a quality culture are characterized by:

- slogans which are materialized in the behaviour of the staff;
- feedback from the clients are actively undertaken in order to continuously improve quality;
- team work is predominant;
- medium level managers are actively implied;
- quality responsibility is not passed from one to another;
- provision deadlines are respected, aiming to continuously improve quality;
- quality training is provided to the employees in order to make sure they have the necessary knowledge for continuous quality improvement;
- rewards and promotions are granted according to the contribution of each employee to the continuous quality improvement;
- the company considers its suppliers as partners and the employees as inner clients.

The decisive role in the success of the quality improvement process is held by top managers, who establish the quality policy so as to inspire trust in quality engagement.

Specialists uttered some minimum demands for the introduction of total quality management, which managers are to consider:

- necessary data must be done directly by an efficient quality manager;
- presentation of in marketing, financial, research – development, production and distribution ways of activity interaction;

- appealing to international standards to constitute a discussion basis for total quality management;
- establishing the work techniques associated to total management qualities;
- recognizing the importance of product and services qualities in satisfying the clients' demands.

A continuous concern for quality management is well known in foreign specialty literature called Never Ending Improvement (N.E.I.). This process of quality improvement must endlessly continue, considering that any of the present processes can be substantially improved. Many of them can be achieved with low costs, but others imply high costs, which are suffered by the buyer.

A very important factor in forming an adequate culture of the total management quality is the managers' behaviour, who must be actively involved in the development of the process of quality improvement, by creating a proper ambiance, by an attentive observation of the market, by a suitable organisation of the labour structure, by charging with responsibilities the ones implied in the activity of quality improvement.

Quality management projection takes a lot of time, effort and skill, so the superior manager needs to grant it a great deal of attention and a sustained support. Success can be obtained only by a persevering team work and by an efficient leadership.

Great companies elaborated their own quality strategies and improvement programmes. The commitment, as far as quality is concerned, is a continuous aim of the ones who wish to keep or develop their position on the market.

Agricola International Quality System is an initiative at the local level and it means, at the same time, a business objective. Anyone who works with or for Agricola International must be at the highest standards of product quality and of business reports. Agricola International's Quality System has clear objectives which are pursued at the level of all business units.

A strict hygiene, quality and sanitary or veterinary norms ensure the necessary conditions for the slaughter houses and the factories of Agricola International to maintain their agreements in order to export to the European Union, or the United States of America. Its specialists are periodically monitoring the activities.

Quality is an aimed objective in the entire organization in order to meet the clients' contentment. Along all its 14 years of existence, organisation management pursued the perfection of the quality system.

At the moment, quality is known by everyone as a fundamental value in the organisation from Bacau. In 2005 it obtained the SR EN ISO 9001-2001 certificate delivered by an international company famous in the field.

Raw material quality is attentively analysed in the labs: meat quality and all the other ingredients are used for improving the quality. During the manufacturing process they pursue a high quality raw material in order to ensure the customer protection.

Acting at a local level, but also at a national and international level, it forms and informs its partners about the standards to be respected, which respond to the uttermost demands. According to the Agricola International Quality System, quality is the main objective of the activity, as the organisation assumes all the responsibilities.

Danone Group is another organisation which has as its objectives the improvement of its products, considering it as its mission to contribute to a healthy nutrition for as many people as possible, on the entire planet, every day, which is harmoniously combined with doctors' and researchers' noble mission.

Danone aims as a future strategy to develop the knowledge and the practical applications concerning healthy food and to remain an active and competent partner in promoting nutrition and life style that maintain health.

Danone Group has only one key message "quality in everything", pursuing two coordinates: the quality of its products and relationship quality. The objective is clearly

stated: to satisfy the customer on a long term. According to the Group's strategy, it is important to grant attention to innovation and to the post-selling system, maybe even more than to the production and delivery activities. Quality responsible people, confined in their laboratories, not a long time ago, become real animators who optimize team activity.

This strategic orientation of the Danone Group is coherent and in accordance to the ISO 9000 norms. Starting with 2000, Danone Group introduced the ISO 9000 process in its factories, which guarantees for each of these, the application of quality management according to the international exigencies, pursued and improved permanently.

For Danone Group quality represents a total value, and it is constantly pursued and achieved in each phase of the production process. Quality, in this case, means the way the product responds to the consumer's needs, the best choice of the raw materials, it implies the adherence to the highest hygienic standards, keeping the nutritive values of the raw material, reducing the impact with the environment, an efficient organisation of all the activities of the company. Quality is the brand for Danone Company, which is daily chosen by thousands of buyers.

Dedeman makes high quality products which satisfy the customers all over the country. As a result, consumers respond by increasing the selling rate, the profit, the added value and the communities in which the company is active develop. The Dedeman company lives by its clients and by the values which it respects.

The specific values of this organisation are: leadership, integrity, the winning wish, trust. The basic principles pursued in the company's activities are: respect, concern for the individual, innovation, the wish to be the best, and harmonious relations with the others. For Dedeman, quality is an extremely important value, a sign of respect and honesty towards the customers.

By the research done on a certain number of important companies at a local, national and international level, having remarkable financial and image success, we may conclude that the performance level is due to the continuous concern of the managers to improve the quality level of the products and of the services offered to the customers. For these companies, quality is not only a demand, but it became a value, a basic component of the organisation culture.

Hence, presently we speak even about creating and developing that quality culture which involves both managers and employees. Quality culture engages the creation a new kind of optic, a new mentality on the quality level of the products and services, which are different from company to company and which supports them to become more and more competitive on the global market, being under a permanent development.

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