

NEW APPROACHES AND DIMENSIONS OF THE QUALITY IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

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Abstract

The present article presents the quality concept, a complex concept and in the same time dynamic, that requires a new approach, different from the previous approach. This approach should take into consideration the impact of the contemporary world's evolution on the quality issue. Today, the quality is one of the most important aspects of the contemporary management, it becomes the arbiter that decides everything, it becomes another philosophy, with other practices, with another behaviour. The success in businesses is determined by great connections with the clients, that oblige the providers of products and services to establish the necessities and the requests of the customers in the middle of their concerns. In other words, the quality of the products and services became the main buying criteria in this context, receiving an enhanced importance. The total quality notion is relatively new, having a large coverage gaining more and more ground. So, the total quality does not endorse only the quality of the products and services, but it endorses several other aspects, such as the work environment quality or the quality of the human resources, starting from the undeniable reality that the quality of the products/services is conditioned by the competence of the employees. The article ends with some opinions regarding the necessity to build a culture in the field of quality which becomes a highly important problem and by looking over the main characteristics of the organizations already having a culture in the field of quality.

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1. Introduction

Quality has always been the main ambassador of a manufacturer on the market.

The world as it is today, with the changes it brings, emphasizes, on all aspects, the importance and dimensions of quality management. The main cause resides in an important mutation, which is the fact that the customer takes precedence and he/she is the one who finally decides the fate of a business. In the new meaning, the customer no longer comes to the supplier, but the supplier is the one chasing the customer, a mutation that alters the entire philosophy of investment. Thus, supple glass and metal structures are built to be easily dismantled and transferred elsewhere.

One of the deeper consequences of this mutation - for an adaptation to customer requirements - consists in setting the functions of products and services at the customer, thus observing the latter's wish, which becomes supreme. We support, without any reservations, the author's opinion, expressed in a valuable work (Pascu, 2014, p.13), pursuant to which the evolution of quality is determined by customer requirements. In this background, there becomes mandatory to always abide by these requirements for manufacturing such products that generate a full satisfaction of the final consumer and profits for the manufacturer.

Up until recently, a manufacturer, with its supreme role in the business equation, used to conceive, all by itself, the functions, dimensions and other elements of quality for its products and services.

Unfortunately, this essential and fundamental mutation has not been received and taken into consideration in all its complexity and role, since manufacturers still design products and services as they imagine them, without knowledge, as we have shown, on the functions of products and services at the customer, therefore, the latter's supreme wish.

The complete lack of receptiveness to this requirement exposes manufacturers to one of the most dangerous risks in business, that is the risk to design, organize and manufacture products and services without knowing the customer's taste and demands and, therefore, risking exposure to customer refusals, in the simplest scenario, and also losing their market share - a more complicated situation - if we take into account the cut-throat competition that exists on the global market nowadays.

Knowing and observing the functions of products and services at the customer can no longer be solved in a manufacturer's offices, it requires marketing research of another calibre than the traditional manner, conducted at a customer level.

Quality management, as we have shown, has always had a decisive role in a manufacturer's business success. Today, things are completely different and knowing the functions of products and services at the customer is a major issue, an objective and fundamental one, in business, but it does not receive the importance it should and the requirements it imposes are not treated with the attention they deserve neither in theory, nor or the more in practice. Therefore, the debated topics are brought up to date and also more opened and of a greater importance for all market players.

Facing the challenges brought about by globalization, in an environment charged with a cut-throat competition, companies often operate deep changes in their business philosophy. Thus, there becomes a necessity to define business in a more reasonable manner as regards social terms. Quality binds an enterprise to assume new responsibilities, both economic and in the social and environmental spheres.(Toma, 2006)

Upon a deep reflection, they all have a major impact on quality management at all levels: production, investment, marketing etc.

2. Quality - Concepts

Quality is a strategic element in the global management of organizations, leading to competitiveness of products and services both at a domestic level and an international one.(Stanciu, 2007, p.17)

Most of all in the context of business globalization and company internationalization, quality becomes today one of the most used concepts.

Therefore, there is no surprise that the specialty literature has made way for varied definitions given in time that deal with quality from varied perspectives.

Thus, Joseph Juran (1973, p.23), a landmark for the world history of quality and seen as one of the "fathers" of quality management, defines quality as being the ability to satisfy the needs or the extent to which a product manages to successfully meet consumer expectations.

Other specialists (Stanciu, 2002, p.65) consider that quality means to fulfill and to exceed consumer expectations.

Another opinion (Şraum, 2000, p.113) states that quality resides in the expression of a product's social usefulness, the extent to which, via the ensemble of its technical and functional traits, psychological and sensory traits and its economic parameters a product manages to satisfy the needs for which it was created and to abide by requirements imposed by the general interest of society as regards economic efficiency, environmental protection and the protection of a social environment.

In technical terms, quality expresses a level of conformity, with clear specifications, provided in product documents. In economic terms, quality expresses the ratio between production costs and customer and, in social terms, quality is represented by quality satisfaction. (Dogaru, 2016, p.9)

It is a sure thing that in the present economic context, quality has become a source of competitive advantage, and organizations who wish to achieve excellence must perceive quality as a natural thing. The need for quality can be compared to the need of resources without which an organization cannot function. (Sălăgean; Ilieş; Garbacea, 2015)

A more ample notion than product/service quality is the one of "total quality". It refers to something beyond product/service quality, to the quality, the competence of every member in an organization who performs small or important tasks for internal or external customers, it relates to the quality of a workplace environment, the quality of technologies etc. The quality of human resources, which refers to the amount of knowledge attained, the cluster of skills, abilities and experience gained, has an enormous influence on the quality of a company's performance. A Total Quality Program is oriented on customer retention, on attracting new customers and on increasing the demand for products/services. Moreover, such a program tries to eliminate any reason of customer dissatisfaction, on all operational levels of an organization. And of course, in the end, the aim is to increase profitability.

3. The Culture of Quality

In view of a continued betterment of quality, of introducing the total quality management, which lies at the junction of three elements, i.e. the customer, the production process and one's own employees, creating a culture of quality becomes a prerequisite of the utmost importance.

A culture of quality entails an emphasis on a range of important elements, such as staff continued training and motivation, creating

organizational structures to implement a quality policy, both in the interest of organizations, and in the interest of customers. Moreover, we support the opinion stated by specialists (Mihăescu;Mihăescu, 2012, p.68) that it is essential for managers, through their strategic vision, to induce employees the need for change and to imprint a pro-change pro-learning attitude.

Of course, the concept of a "culture of quality" is derived from the general concept of culture and it can be defined as "the sum total of acquired and recognized knowledge, of values related to quality based on which an organization builds its own skills to survive in the outside world and administers its internal affairs".(Militaru, Drăguț, Zanfir, 2014, p.119). A culture of quality aims at values, standards, traditions, expectations and activities practiced in organizations in terms of planning, implementation, assessment and improvement of activities. On the other hand, the creation and development of a culture of quality stands as the pillar for continued improvement.

The specialists (Militaru, Dragut,Zanfir, 2014, p.120) have identified a range of peculiarities shown by organizations who possess a culture of quality, which traits distinguish such organizations, irrespective of what products and services they offer. Here are some of them:

- employee behavior is a reflection of slogans;
- team work becomes the rule and thus, each individual is directly interested to check his/her own work;
- messages coming from customers are used and they play an important role in the continuous improvement of quality. Customer feedback is a barometer without which continuous improvement would be impossible to achieve;
- employees are equally involved and authorized to perform certain activities;
- middle and senior management is equally involved and committed;
- absence of delegating responsibility for quality. Responsibility for quality belongs to all and each employee;
- in time resource allotment so as to ensure a continuous improvement of quality;

- training and education are offered so as to make sure that employees have the knowledge and the skills required for a continuous improvement of quality;
- promotions and incentives are based on employee contributions to quality improvement;
- suppliers are seen as partners;
- employees are seen as internal customers.

As regards the culture entailed by a TQM organization, another renowned specialist (Berry, 1991) pinpoints a series of important elements:

- the customer comes first and foremost;
- involvement of the entire staff is crucial;
- team work and collaboration are essential ;
- internal customers are important;
- customer satisfaction is more important than any other indicator;
- long-term improvement is preferred to short-term orientation.

A culture of quality involves a broad vision on competition as resulted from matching and complementing individual skills and it manifests itself in a permanent attention granted to the smallest of details, to constant checking, a strong will to achieve high quality results, no matter the effort, time and energy required.

4. Conclusions

Quality in the world of today is the starting point in achieving success and it holds completely other connotations as to those which we have grown used to. Such a change in view and perspective is imposed by the evolution of the contemporary world, mostly by economy, organization and management based on knowledge, change, the globalization of business affairs and others, which, in essence, change the role and the position of customers in the equation of business.

An essential change is that the customer is positioned first and foremost and the supplier occupies the second place, a turn of tables that alters not only the concept of quality management, but also the background.

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